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WORK



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# WORK

[TRAVAIL]

BY  
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TRANSLATED BY

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## PREFACE

'Work' is the second book of the new series which M. Zola began with 'Fruitfulness,' and which he hopes to complete with 'Truth' and 'Justice.' I should much have liked to discuss here in some detail several of the matters which M. Zola brings forward in this instalment of his literary testament, but unfortunately the latter part of the present translation has been made by me in the midst of great bodily suffering, and I have not now the strength to do as I desired. I will only say, therefore, that 'Work' embraces many features. It is, first, an exposition of M. Zola's gospel of work, as the duty of every man born into the world and the sovereign cure for many ills—a gospel which he has set forth more than once in the course of his numerous writings, and which will be found synthetised, so to say, in a paper called 'Life and Labour' translated by me for the 'New Review' some years ago.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, 'Work' deals with the present-day conditions of society so far as those conditions are affected by Capital and Labour. And, thirdly and particularly, it embraces a scheme of social reorganisation and regeneration in which the ideas of Charles Fourier, the eminent philosopher, are taken as a basis and broadened and adapted to the needs of a new century. Some may regard this scheme as being merely the splendid dream of a poet (the book

<sup>1</sup> *New Review*, No. 50, July, 1893.

certainly abounds in symbolism), but all must admit that it is a scheme of *pacif*ic evolution, and therefore one to be preferred to the violent remedies proposed by most Socialist schools.

In this respect the book has a peculiar<sup>c</sup> significance. Though the English press pays very little attention to the matter, things are moving apace in France. The quiet of that country is only surface-deep. The Socialist schools are each day making more and more progress. The very peasants are fast becoming Socialists, and, as I wrote comparatively recently in my preface to the new English version of M. Zola's 'Germinal,' the most serious troubles may almost at any moment convulse the Republic. Thus it is well that M. Zola, who has always been a fervent partisan of peace and human brotherliness, should be found at such a juncture pointing out pacific courses to those who believe that a bath of blood must necessarily precede all social regeneration.

Incidentally, in the course of his statements and arguments, M. Zola brings forward some very interesting points. I would particularly refer the reader to what he writes on the subject of education. Again, his sketch of the unhappy French peasant of nowadays may be scanned with advantage by those who foolishly believe that peasant to be one of the most contented beings in the world. The contrary is unhappily the case, the subdivision of the soil having reached such a point that the land cannot be properly or profitably cultivated. After lasting a hundred years, the order of things established in the French provinces by the Great Revolution has utterly broken down. The economic conditions of the world have changed, and the only hope for French agriculture rests in farming on a huge scale. This the peasant, amidst his hard struggle with pauperism, is now realising, and this it is which is fast making him a Socialist.

All that M. Zola writes in 'Work' on the subject of iron

and steel factories, and the progressive changes in processes and so forth, will doubtless be read with interest at the present time, when so much is being said and written about a certain large American 'trust.' The reliance which he places in Science—the great pacific revolutionary—to effect the most advantageous changes in present-day conditions of labour, is assuredly justified by facts. Personally, I rely far more on science than on any innate spirit of brotherliness between men, to bring about comparative happiness for the human race.

In conclusion, I may point out that the tendency of M. Zola's book in one respect is shown by the title chosen for the present translation. The original is called 'Travail,' which might have been rendered in English as either 'Labour' or 'Work.' We read every day about the 'labour world,' the 'conditions of labour,' the 'labour party,' and so forth, and as these matters are largely dealt with by M. Zola, some may think that 'Labour' would have been the better title for the English version of his book. But then it is M. Zola's desire that man should *labour* no more; he does not wish him to groan beneath excessive toil—he simply desires that he should *work*, in health and in gaiety, with the help of science to lighten his task, and a just apportionment of wealth and happiness to gild his days until he takes his rest.

E. A. V.

MERTON, SURREY:

*April 1901.*



# W O R K

## BOOK I

### I

As Luc Froment walked on at random after emerging from Beauclair, he went up the Brias road, following the gorge in which the Mionne torrent flows between the two promontories of the Bleuse Mountains. And when he found himself before the Abyss, as the Qurignon steel-works are called in the region, he perceived two dark and puny creatures shrinking timidly against the parapet at the corner of the wooden bridge. His heart contracted. One was a woman looking very young, poorly clad, her head half hidden by some ragged woollen stuff; and the other, nestling amidst her skirts, was a white-faced child, about six years old, and scarcely clothed at all. Both had their eyes fixed on the door of the works, and were waiting, motionless, with the mournful patience of despairing beings.

Luc paused and also looked. It would soon be six o'clock, and the light of that wretched, muggy, mid-September evening was already waning. It was a Saturday, and since Thursday the rain had scarcely ceased to fall. It was no longer coming down at present, but across the sky an impetuous wind was still driving a number of clouds, sooty ragged clouds, athwart which filtered a dirty, yellowish twilight, full of mortal sadness. Along the road over which stretched lines of rails, and where big paving-stones were disjoined by continuous traffic, there flowed a river of black mud, all the gathered moistened dust of the neighbouring coal-works of Brias, whose tumbrils were for ever going by. And that coal-dust had cast a blackness as of mourning over the entire gorge; it fell in patches over the leprous pile of factory buildings, and seemed even to besmirk those dark clouds which passed on interminably like



## WORK

moor. An ominous melancholy swept by with the wind; one might have thought that the murky quivering twilight was bringing the end of the world in its train.

Lus had stopped short at a few paces from the young woman and the boy, and he heard the latter saying with a shrewd decisive air, like one who was already a little man: 'I say, *ma grande*,<sup>1</sup> would you like me to speak to him? P'raps he wouldn't get so angry with me.'

But the young woman replied: 'No, no, *frérot*, those are not matters for little boys.'

Then again they continued waiting in silence, with an air of anxious resignation.

Lus was now looking at the Abyss. From professional curiosity he had visited it when first passing through Beaulair the previous spring. And during the few hours that he had again found himself in the district, suddenly summoned thither by his friend Jordan, he had heard through what a frightful crisis the region had just passed. There had been a terrible strike of two months' duration, and ruin was piled up on either side. The establishment had greatly suffered from the stoppage of work, and the workmen, their rage increased by their powerlessness, had almost starved. It was only two days previously, on the Thursday, that work had been resumed after reciprocal concessions, wrung from either party with the greatest difficulty after the most furious wrangling. And the men had gone back like joyless, vanquished beings enraged by defeat, retaining in their hearts only a recollection of their sufferings and a keen desire for revenge.

Under the wild flight of the mourning clouds the Abyss spread its sombre piles of buildings and sheds. It was like a monster which had sprung up there, extending by degrees the roofs of its little town. One could guess the ages of the various structures by the colour of those roofs which arose and spread out in every direction. The establishment now occupied a surface of many acres and employed a thousand hands. The lofty, bluish, slated roofs of the great halls with coupled windows, overtopped the old blackened tiles of the earlier buildings, which were far more humble. Up above one perceived from the road the gigantic laves of the cementing-furnaces, ranged in a row, as well as the tempering tower,

<sup>1</sup> Literally 'my big one,' i.e. 'big sister.' We have no exact equivalent for this expression as a form of endearment, nor for the ensuing one, *frérot*, 'little brother.'—Trans.

seventy-eight feet high, where big cannon were plunged on end into baths of petroleum. And higher still ascended smoking chimneys, chimneys of all sizes, a very forest, whose sooty breath-mingled with the flying soot of the clouds, whilst at regular intervals narrow blast-pipes, with strident respiration, threw out white plumes of steam. All this seemed like the breathing of the monster. The dust, the vapour that it incessantly exhaled, enveloped it as in an everlasting cloud of the perspiration of toil. And there was also the beating of its organs, the impact, the noise of its every effort: the vibration of machinery, the clear cadence of helve-hammers, the great rhythmical blows of steam-hammers resounding like huge bells and making the soil shake. And at the edge of the road, in the depths of a little building, where the first Qurignon had first forged iron, one could hear the violent, desperate dance of two tilt-hammers which were beating there like the very pulse of the colossus, every one of whose life-devouring furnaces flamed afresh.

In the ruddy and dismal crepuscular mist which was gradually submerging the Abyss, not a single electric lamp as yet lighted up the yards. Nor was there any light gleaming through the dusty windows. Alone, through the gaping doorway of one of the large halls, there burst a vivid flame which transpierced the gloom with a long jet of light, like that of some fusing star. A master puddler had doubtless opened the door of his furnace. And nothing else, not even a stray spark, proclaimed the presence of the empire of fire, the fire roaring within that darkened city of toil, the internal fire which heated the whole of it, the trained, subjected fire which bent and fashioned iron like soft wax, and which had given man royalty over the earth ever since the first Vulcans had conquered it.

At last the clock in the little belfry surmounting the offices struck six o'clock. And Luc then again heard the poor child saying: 'Listen, *ma grande*, they will be coming out now.'

'Yes, yes, I know well enough,' the young woman answered. 'Just you keep quiet.'

As she moved forward to restrain the child, her ragged wrapper fell back slightly from before her face, and Luc remarked the delicacy of her features with surprise. She was surely less than twenty. She had fair hair all in disorder, a poor, thin little face which to him seemed ugly, blue eyes

blurred by tears, and a pale mouth that twitched bitterly with suffering. And what a light, girlish frame there was within her old threadbare dress! And with what a weak and trembling arm did she press to her skirts the child, her little brother, who was fair like herself and equally ill-combed, but stronger-looking and more resolute! Luc felt his compassion increasing, whilst the two poor creatures on their side grew distrustfully anxious about that gentleman who had stopped so near, and was examining them so persistently. She, in particular, seemed embarrassed by the scrutiny of that young fellow of five-and-twenty, so tall and handsome, with square-set shoulders, broad hands and a face all health and joy, whose firmly-marked features were o'ertopped by a straight and towering brow, the towering brow of the Froment family. She had averted her gaze as it met the young man's brown eyes, which looked her frankly in the face. Then she once more stole a furtive glance, and seeing that he was smiling at her in a kindly way, she drew back a little more, in the disquietude born of her great distress.

The clang of a bell was heard, there was a stir in the Abyss, and then began the departure of the day-shifts which the night-shifts were about to replace; for never is there a pause in the monster's devouring life; it flames and forges both by day and night. Nevertheless there was some delay in the departure of the day-hands. Although work had only been resumed on the Thursday, most of them had applied for an advance, for after that terrible strike of two months' duration great was the hunger in every home. At last they began to appear, coming along one by one or in little parties, all gloomy and in a hurry, with their heads bent whilst in the depths of their pockets they stowed away their few dearly earned silver coins which would procure a little bread for wife and children. And in turn they disappeared along the black highway.

'There he is, *ma grande*,' the little boy muttered. 'Can't you see him? He's with Bourron.'

'Yes, yes; keep quiet.'

Two men, two puddlers, had just left the works. The first, who was accompanied by Bourron, had a cloth jacket thrown over his shoulders. He was barely six-and-twenty; his hair and beard were ruddy, and he was rather short, though his muscles were strong. Under a prominent brow he showed a hook nose, massive jaws, and projecting cheek-

bones, yet he could laugh in a very agreeable way, which largely accounted for his success with women. Bourron, five years the elder, and closely buttoned in an old jacket of greenish velveteen, was a tall, dry, scraggy fellow, whose equine face, with long cheeks, short chin, and eyes set almost sideways, expressed the quiet nature of a man who takes life easily, and is always under the influence of one or another mate.

Bourron had caught sight of the mournful woman and child standing across the road at the corner of the wooden bridge, and, nudging his companion with his elbow, he exclaimed: 'I say, Ragu, Josine and Nanet are yonder. Be careful if you don't want them to pester you.'

Ragu ragefully clenched his fists. 'The —— girl! I've had enough of her, I've turned her out! Just let her try to come dangling after me again and you'll see!'

He seemed to be slightly intoxicated, as always happened indeed on those days when he exceeded the three quarts of wine which he declared he needed to prevent the heat of the furnace from drying up his skin. And in his semi-intoxication he yielded the more especially to a cruel boastful impulse to show his mate how he treated girls when he no longer cared for them.

'I shall send her packing,' said he, 'I've had enough of her.'

With Nanet still among her skirts Josine was now gently, timidly, stepping forward. But she paused on seeing two other workmen approach Ragu and Bourron. They belonged to a night-shift, and had just arrived from Beauclair. Fauchard, the eldest, a man of thirty, looking quite ten years older, was a drawer, and seemed already 'done for' by his terrible work. His face had the appearance of boiled flesh, his eyes were scorched, the whole of his big frame burnt and warped by the ardent glow of the furnaces when he drew out the fusing metal. The other, his brother-in-law Fortuné, was a lad of sixteen, though he would hardly have been thought twelve, so puny was his frame. He had a thin face and discoloured hair, and looked as if he had ceased growing, as if, indeed, he were eaten into by the mechanical toil which he ever performed, perched beside the lever of a helve-hammer amidst all the bewilderment born of blinding steam and deafening noise.

On his arm Fauchard carried an old black osier basket,

and he had stopped to ask the others in a husky voice: 'Did you go?'

He wished to ascertain if they had gone to the cashier's office and obtained an advance there. And when Ragu, without a word, slapped his pocket in which some five-franc pieces jingled, the other made a despairing gesture and exclaimed: 'Thunder! To think that I've got to tighten my belt until to-morrow morning, and that I shall be dying of thirst all night unless my wife by some miracle or other contrives to bring me my ration by-and-by.'

His ration was four quarts of wine for each day or night-shift, and he was wont to say that this quantity only just sufficed to moisten his body, to such a degree did the furnaces drain all the blood and water from his flesh. He cast a mournful glance at his basket, in which nothing save a hunk of bread was jolting. The failure to secure his usual four quarts of wine meant the end of everything, black agony amidst overpowering unbearable toil.

'Bah!' said Bourron complacently, 'your wife won't leave you in the lurch; she hasn't her equal for getting credit somewhere.'

Then, all at once, the four men standing in the sticky mud became silent and touched their caps. Luc had seen a kind of bath-chair approaching, propelled by a servant; and ensconced within it sat an old gentleman with a broad face and regular features around which fell an abundance of long white hair. In this old gentleman the young fellow recognised Jérôme Qurignon, 'Monsieur Jérôme' as he was called throughout the region, the son of Blaise Qurignon, the drawer, by whom the Abyss had been founded. Very aged and paralysed, never speaking, Monsieur Jérôme caused himself to be carted about in this fashion, no matter what might be the weather.

That evening, as he passed the works on his way back to his daughter's residence, La Guerdache, a neighbouring estate, he had signed to his servant to go more slowly, and with his still bright, living eyes he had then taken a long look at the ever-busy monster, at the day hands departing homeward, and at the night hands arriving, whilst the vague twilight fell from the livid sky besmirched by rushing clouds. And his glance had afterwards rested on the manager's house, a square building standing in a garden, which his father had erected forty years previously, and

where he himself had long reigned like a conquering king, gaining million after million.

'Monsieur Jérôme isn't bothered as to how he will get any wine to-night,' resumed Bourron in a sneering whisper.

Ragu shrugged his shoulders: 'My great-grandfather and Monsieur Jérôme's father,' said he, 'were comrades. Yes, they were both workmen and drew iron here together. The fortune might have come to a Ragu just as well as to a Qurignon. It's all luck, you know, when it isn't robbery.'

'Be quiet,' Bourron muttered, 'you'll be getting into trouble.'

Ragu's bounce deserted him, and when Monsieur Jérôme, passing the group, looked at the four men with his large, fixed, limpid eyes, he again touched his cap with all the timorous respect of a toiler who is ready enough to cry out against employers behind their backs, but has long years of slavery in his blood and trembles in the presence of the sovereign god from whom he awaits the bread of life. The servant meanwhile slowly pushed the bath-chair onward, and Monsieur Jérôme disappeared at last down the black road descending towards Beauclair.

'Bah!' said Fauchard philosophically by way of conclusion, 'he's not so happy after all, in that wheelbarrow of his. And besides, if he can still understand things, that strike can't have been very pleasant to him. We each have our troubles. But thunder! I only hope that Natalie will bring me my wine.'

Then he went off into the works, taking with him little Fortuné, who had not spoken a word, and looked as bewildered as ever. Already feeling weary, they disappeared amidst the increasing darkness which was enveloping the buildings; whilst Ragu and Bourron set out again, the former bent on leading the latter astray, to some tavern in the town. But then, dash it all, a man surely had a right to drink a glass and laugh a bit after undergoing so much misery!

However, Luc, who, from compassionate curiosity had remained leaning against the parapet of the bridge, saw Josine again advance with short unsteady steps to bar the way to Ragu. For a moment she had hoped that he would cross the bridge homeward bound, for that was the direct road to Old Beauclair, a sordid mass of hovels in which most of the workpeople of the Abyss lived. But when she understood that he was going down to the new town, she foresaw

what would happen: the money he had obtained would be spent in some wineshop, and she and her little brother would have to spend another whole evening waiting, dying of starvation, amidst the bitter wind in the streets. And her sufferings and a fit of sudden anger lent her so much courage that, puny and woeful though she was, she went and took her stand before the man.

'Be reasonable, Auguste,' said she; 'you can't leave me out-of-doors.'

He did not answer, but stepped on in order to pass her.

'If you are not going home at once, give me the key, at any rate,' she continued. 'We've been in the street ever since this morning, without even a morsel of bread to eat.'

At this he burst forth: 'Just let me be! Haven't you done sticking to me like a leech?'

'Why did you carry off the key this morning?' she answered. 'I only ask you to give me the key, you can come in when you like. It is almost night now, and you surely don't want us to sleep on the pavement.'

'The key! the key! I haven't got it, and even if I had I wouldn't give it you. Just understand, once for all, that I've had enough of it, that I don't want to have anything more to do with you, that it's quite enough that we starved together for two months, and that now you can go somewhere else, and see if I'm there!'

He shouted those words in her face, violently and savagely; and she, poor little creature, quivered beneath his insults, whilst gently persevering in her efforts with all the woeful desperation of a wretch who feels the very ground giving way beneath her.

'Oh! you are cruel! you are cruel!' she gasped. 'We'll have a talk when you come home to-night. I'll go away to-morrow if it's necessary. But to-day, give me the key just for to-day.'

Then the man, infuriated, pushed her, thrust her aside with a brutal gesture. 'Curse it all!' he cried, 'doesn't the road belong to me as much as you? Go and croak wherever you like! I tell you that it's all over.' And as little Nanet, seeing his sister sob, stepped forward with his air of decision, his pink face and tangle of fair hair, Ragu added: 'What! the brat as well! Am I to have the whole family on my shoulders now? Wait a minute, you young rascal; I'll let you feel my boot somewhere.'

Josine quickly drew Nanet towards her. And they both

remained there, standing in the black mud, shivering with woe, whilst the two workmen went their way, disappearing amidst the gloom in the direction of Beauclair, whose lights, one by one, were now beginning to shine. Bourron, who at bottom was a good-natured fellow, had made a movement as if to intervene; then, however, in a spirit of imitation, yielding to the influence of his rakish companion, he had let things take their course. And Josine, after momentarily hesitating, asking what use it would be to follow, made up her mind to do so with despairing stubbornness as soon as the others had disappeared. With slow steps she descended the road in their wake, dragging her little brother by the hand, and keeping very close to the walls, taking indeed all sorts of precautions, as if she feared that on seeing her they might beat her to prevent her from dogging their steps.

Luc, in his indignation, had almost rushed on Ragu to administer a correction to him. Ah! the misery of labour!—man turned to a wolf by overpowering and unjust toil, by the difficulty of earning the bread for which hunger so wildly contends! During those two months of the strike, crumbs had been fought for amidst all the voracity and exasperation of daily quarrels. Then, on the very first pay-day, the man rushed to Drink for forgetfulness, leaving his companion of woe, whether she were his wife or a girl he had seduced, in the streets! And Luc remembered the four years which he had lately spent in a faubourg of Paris, in one of those huge, poison-reeking buildings where the misery of the working classes sobs and fights upon every floor! How many tragedies had he not witnessed, how many sorrows had he not attempted to assuage! The frightful problem born of all the shame and torture attending the wage system had often arisen before his mind; he had fully sounded that system's atrocious iniquity, the horrible sore which is eating away present-day society, and he had spent hours of generous enthusiasm in dreaming of a remedy, ever encountering, however, the iron wall of existing reality. And now, on the very evening of his return to Beauclair, he came upon that savage scene, that pale and mournful creature cast starving into the streets through the fault of the all-devouring monster, whose internal fire he could ever hear growling, whilst overhead it escaped in murky smoke rolling away under the tragic sky.

A gust of wind passed, and a few rain-drops flew by in the moaning wind. Luc had remained on the bridge,



looking towards Beauclair and trying to take his bearings by the last gleams of light that fell athwart the sooty clouds. On his right was the Abyss, with its buildings bordering the Brias road ; beneath him rolled the Mionne, whilst higher up, along an embankment on the left, passed the railway line from Brias to Magnolles. These filled the depths of the gorge, between the last spurs of the Bleuse Mountains, at the spot where they parted to disclose the great plain of La Roumagne. And in a kind of estuary, at the spot where the ravine debouched into the plain, Beauclair reared its houses : a wretched collection of working-class dwellings, prolonged over the flat by a little middle-class town, in which were the sub-prefecture, the town-hall, the law-courts, and the prison, whilst the ancient church, whose walls threatened to fall, stood part in new and part in old Beauclair. This town, the chief one of an *arrondissement*,<sup>1</sup> numbered barely six thousand souls, five thousand of them being poor humble souls in suffering bodies, warped, ground to death by iniquitous hard toil. And Luc took in everything fully when, above the Abyss, half-way up the promontory of the Bleuse Mountains, he distinguished the dark silhouette of the blast furnace of La Crêcherie. Labour ! labour ! ah ! who would redeem and reorganise it according to the natural law of truth and equity so as to restore to it its position as the most noble, all-regulating, all-powerful force of the world, and so as to ensure a just division of the world's riches, thereby at last bringing the happiness which is rightly due to every man !

Although the rain had again ceased Luc also ended by going down towards Beauclair. Workmen were still leaving the Abyss, and he walked among them as they tramped on, thinking of that rageful resumption of work after all the disasters of the strike. Such infinite sadness born of rebellion and powerlessness pervaded the young man that he would have gone away that evening, indeed that moment, had he not feared to inconvenience his friend Jordan. The latter—the master of La Crêcherie—had been placed in a position of great embarrassment by the sudden death of the old engineer who had managed his smeltery, and he had written to Luc, asking him to come, inquire into things, and give him some good advice. Then, the young man, on

<sup>1</sup> Each French 'department' or county is for administrative purposes divided into two, three, or four '*arrondissements*'; and the *arrondissements* in their turn are subdivided into '*cantons*.'—*Trans.*

hastening to Beaulair in an affectionate spirit, had found another letter awaiting him, a letter in which Jordan announced a family catastrophe, the sudden, tragical death of a cousin at Cannes, which obliged him to leave at once and remain absent with his sister for three days. He begged Luc to wait for them until Monday evening, and to instal himself meanwhile in a pavilion which he placed at his disposal, and where he might make himself fully at home. Thus Luc still had another two days to waste, and for lack of other occupation, cast as he was in that little town which he scarcely knew, he had gone that evening for a ramble, telling the servant who waited on him that he should not even return to dinner. Passionately interested as he was in popular manners and customs, fond of observing and learning, he felt that he could get something to eat in any tavern of the town.

New thoughts came upon him, whilst under the wild tempestuous sky he walked on through the black mud amidst the heavy tramping of the harassed, silent workmen. He felt ashamed of his previous sentimental weakness. Why should he go off, when here again he once more found, so poignant and so keen, the problem by which he was ever haunted? He must not flee the fight, he must gather facts together, and, perhaps, amidst the dim confusion in which he was still seeking a solution, he might at last discover the safe, sure path that led to it. A son of Pierre and Marie Froment, he had learnt, like his brothers Mathieu, Marc and Jean, a manual calling apart from the special study which he had made of engineering. He was a stone-cutter, a house-builder, and having a taste for that avocation, fond of working at times in the great Paris building-yards, he was familiar with the tragedies of the present-day labour-world, and dreamt, in a fraternal spirit, of helping on the peaceful triumph of the labour-world of to-morrow. But what could he do, in which direction should he make an effort, by what reform should he begin, how was he to bring forth the solution which he felt to be vaguely palpitating within him? Taller and stronger than his brother Mathieu, with the open face of a man of action, a towering brow, a lofty mind ever in travail, he had hitherto embraced but the void with those big arms of his which were so impatient to create and build. But again a sudden gust of wind sped by, a hurricane blast, which made him quiver as with awe. Was it in some

Messiah-like capacity that an unknown force had cast him into that woeful region to fulfil the long-dreamt-of mission of deliverance and happiness?

When Luc, raising his head, freed himself of those vague reflections, he perceived that he had come back to Beauclair again. Four large streets, meeting at a central square, the Place de la Mairie, divide the town into four more or less equal portions; and each of these streets bears the name of some neighbouring town towards which it leads. On the north is the Rue de Brias, on the west the Rue de Saint-Cron, on the east the Rue de Magnolles, and on the south the Rue de Formerie. The most popular, the most bustling of all—with its many shops stocked to overflowing—is the Rue de Brias, in which Luc at present found himself. For in that direction lie all the factories, from which a dark stream of toilers pours whenever leaving-off time comes round. Just as Luc arrived, the great door of the Gourier boot-works, belonging to the Mayor of Beauclair, opened, and away rushed its five hundred hands, amongst whom were numbered more than two hundred women and children. Then, in some of the neighbouring streets, were Chodorge's works, where only nails were made; Hausser's works, which turned out more than a hundred thousand scythes and sickles every year, and Mirande's works, which more particularly supplied agricultural machinery.

They had all suffered from the strike at the Abyss, where they supplied themselves with raw material, iron and steel. Distress and hunger had passed over every one of them, the wan, thin workers who poured from them on to the muddy paving-stones had rancour in their eyes and mute revolt upon their lips, although they showed the seeming resignation of a hurrying, tramping flock. Under the few lamps, whose yellow flames flickered in the wind, the street was black with toilers homeward bound. And the block in the circulation was increased by a number of housewives who, having at last secured a few coppers to spend, were hastening to one or another shop to treat themselves to a big loaf or a little meat.

It seemed to Luc as if he were in some town, the siege of which had been raised that very evening. Hither and thither among the crowd walked gendarmes, quite a number of armed men, who kept a close watch on the inhabitants, as if from fear of a resumption of hostilities, some sudden fury arising

from galling sufferings, whence might come the sack of the town in a supreme impulse of destructive exasperation. No doubt the masters, the *bourgeois* authorities, had overcome the wage-earners, but, the overpowered slaves still remained so threatening in their passive silence that the atmosphere reeked of bitterness, and one felt a dread of vengeance, of the possibility of some great massacre, sweeping by. A vague grôwl came from that beaten, powerless flock, filing along the street; and the glitter of a weapon, the silver braid of a uniform shining here and there among the groups, testified to the unacknowledged fear of the employers, who, despite their victory, were bursting into perspiration behind the thick, carefully drawn curtains of their pleasure houses; whilst the black crowd of starveling toilers still and ever went by with lowered heads, hustling one another in silence.

Whilst continuing his ramble Luc mingled with the groups, paused, listened, and studied things. In this wise he halted before a large butcher's shop open on the street, where several gas-jets were flaring amidst ruddy meat. Dacheux, the master butcher, a fat apoplectical man, with big goggle eyes set in a short red face, stood on the threshold keeping watch over his viands, evincing the while much politeness towards the servants of well-to-do customers, and becoming extremely suspicious directly any poor housewife came in. For the last few minutes he had kept his eyes upon a tall slim blonde, pale, sickly, and wretched, whose youthful good looks had already faded, and who, whilst dragging with her a fine child between four and five years old, carried upon one arm a heavy basket, whence protruded the necks of four quart-bottles of wine. In this woman Dacheux had recognised La Fauchard, whose constant appeals for little credits he was tired of discouraging. And as she made up her mind to go in, he all but barred the way.

'What do you want again, you?' he asked.

'Monsieur Dacheux,' stammered Natalie, 'if you would only be so kind—my husband has gone back to the works you know, and will receive something on account to-morrow. And so Monsieur Caffiaux was good enough to advance me the four quarts I have here, and would you be so kind, Monsieur Dacheux, as to advance me a little meat, just a little bit of meat?'

At this the butcher became furious, his blood rushed to his face, and he bellowed: 'No, I've told you no before! That

strike of yours nearly ruined me! How can you think me fool enough to be on your side? There will always be enough lazy workmen to prevent honest folk from doing business. When people don't work enough to eat meat, they go without it!

He busied himself with politics, and like a narrow-minded hot-tempered man, one who was greatly feared, he was on the side of the rich and powerful. On his lips the word 'meat' assumed aristocratic importance: meat was sacred, it was a luxury reserved to the happy ones of the earth, when it ought to have belonged to all.

'You owe me four francs from last summer,' he resumed; 'I have to pay people, I have!'

At this Natalie almost collapsed, then she again strove to touch him, pleading in a low prayerful voice. But an incident which occurred just then completed her discomfiture. Madame Dacheux, an ugly, dark, insignificant-looking little woman, who none the less contrived to make her husband the talk of the town, stepped forward with her little daughter Julienne, a child of four, plump, healthy, fair, and full of gaiety. And the two children having caught sight of one another, little Louis Fauchard, despite all his wretchedness, began to laugh, whilst the buxom Julienne, feeling amused, and doubtless as yet unconscious of social inequalities, drew near and took hold of his hands. In such wise that there was sudden play, fraught with childish delight, as at the prospect of some future reconciliation of the classes.

'The little nuisance!' cried Dacheux, who had quite lost his temper. 'She's always getting between my legs. Go and sit down at once!'

Then, turning his wrath upon his wife, he roughly sent her back to the cash desk, saying that the best thing she could do was to keep an eye on the till, so that she might not be robbed again, as she had been robbed only two days previously. And, haunted as he was by that theft, of which he had never ceased to complain with the greatest indignation during the last forty-eight hours, he went on, addressing himself to all the people in the shop: 'Yes, indeed, some kind of beggar woman crept in' and took five francs out of the till whilst Madame Dacheux was looking to see if the flies laughed. She wasn't able to deny it, she still had the money in her hand. Oh! I had her taken into custody at once. She's at the gaol. It is frightful, frightful; we shall

be utterly robbed and plundered soon if we don't keep our eyes open.'

Then with suspicious glances he again watched his meat to make sure that no starving wretches, no workwomen out of work, should carry any pieces away from the show outside, even as they might carry away precious gold, divine gold, from the bowls in the windows of the money-changers' shops.

Luc saw La Fauchard grow alarmed and retire; she feared, no doubt, that the butcher might summon a gendarme. For a moment she and her little Louis remained motionless in the middle of the street, amidst all the jostling, their faces turned the while towards a fine baker's shop, decorated with mirrors and gaily lighted up, which faced the butcher's establishment. In one of its windows, which was open, numerous cakes and large loaves with a crust of a golden hue were freely displayed under the noses of the passers-by. Before those loaves and cakes lingered the mother and the child, deep in contemplation. And Luc, forgetting them, became interested in what was taking place inside the shop.

A cart had just stopped at the door, and a peasant had alighted from it with a little boy about eight years old and a girl of six. At the counter stood the baker's wife, the beautiful Madame Mitaine, a strongly-built blonde who at five-and-thirty had remained superb. The whole district had been in love with her, but she had never ceased to be faithful to her husband, a thin, silent, cadaverous-looking man who was seldom seen, for he was almost always busy at his kneading trough or his oven. On the bench near his wife sat their son, Evariste, a lad of ten, who was already tall, fair, too, like his mother, with an amiable face and soft eyes.

'What, is it you, Monsieur Lenfant!' said Madame Mitaine. 'How do you do?—And there's your Arsène, and your Olympe. I need not ask you if they are in good health.'

The peasant was a man in the thirties, with a broad sedate face. He did not hurry, but ended by answering in his thoughtful way, 'Yes, yes, their health is good; one doesn't get along so badly at Les Combettes. The soil's the most poorly. I shan't be able to let you have the bran I promised you, Madame Mitaine. It all miscarried. And as I had to come to Beauclair this evening with the cart, I thought I'd let you know.'

He went on giving expression to all his rancour against the ungrateful earth, which no longer fed the toiler, nor even

paid for sowing and manuring. And the beautiful Madame Mitaine gently nodded her head. It was quite true. One had to work a great deal nowadays to reap but little satisfaction. Few were able to satisfy their hunger. She did not busy herself with politics, but, *mon Dieu*, things were really taking a very bad turn. During that strike, for instance, her heart had almost burst at the thought that a great many poor people went to bed without even a crust to eat when her shop was full of loaves. But trade was trade, was it not? One could not give one's goods away for nothing, particularly as in doing so one might seem to be encouraging rebellion.

And Lenfant approved her. 'Yes, yes,' said he, 'everyone his own. It's only fair that one should get profit from things when one has taken trouble with them. But all the same there are some who want to make too much profit.'

Evariste, interested by the sight of Arsène and Olympe, had made up his mind to quit the counter and do them the honours of the shop. And like a big boy of ten he smiled complaisantly at the little girl of six, whose big round head and gay expression probably amused him.

'Give them each a little cake,' said beautiful Madame Mitaine, who greatly spoilt her son, and was bringing him up to kindly ways.

And then, as Evariste began by giving a cake to Arsène, she protested jestingly: 'But you must be gallant, my dear. One ought to begin with the ladies!'

At this Evariste and Olympe, all confusion, began to laugh, and promptly became friends. Ah! the dear little ones, they constitute the best part of life. If some day they were minded to be wise they would not devour one another as do the folk of to-day. And Lenfant went off, saying that he hoped to be able to bring some bran after all, but, of course, later on.

Madame Mitaine, who had accompanied him to her door, watched him climb into his cart and drive down the Rue de Brias. And at this moment Luc noticed Madame Fauchard, dragging her little Louis with her, and suddenly making up her mind to approach the baker's wife. She spoke some words which Luc did not catch, a request no doubt for further credit, for beautiful Madame Mitaine, with a gesture of consent, immediately went into her shop again, and gave her a large loaf, which the poor creature hastened to carry away, close-pressed to her scraggy bosom.

Dacheux, amidst his suspicious exasperation, had watched the scene from the opposite foot pavement. 'You'll get yourself robbed!' he cried. 'Some boxes of sardines have just been stolen at Caffiaux's. They are stealing everywhere!'

'Bah!' gaily answered Madame Mitaine, who had returned to the threshold of her shop. 'They only steal from the rich!'

Luc slowly went down the Rue de Brias amidst the flock-like tramping which ever and ever increased. It now seemed to him as if a Terror were sweeping by, as if some gust of violence were about to transport that gloomy, silent throng. Then, as he reached the Place de la Mairie, he again saw Lenfant's cart, this time standing at the street corner, in front of some large ironmongery stores, kept by the Laboques, husband and wife. The doors of the establishment were wide open, and he heard some violent bartering going on between the peasant and the ironmonger.

'Good heavens! why, you charge as much for your spades as if they were made of gold! Why, for this one you ask two francs more than usual.'

'But, Monsieur Lenfant, there has been that cursed strike. It isn't our fault if the factories haven't worked and if everything has gone up in price. I pay more for all metal goods, and, of course, I have to make a profit.'

'Make a profit, yes, but not double prices. Ah! you do drive a trade! It will soon be impossible to buy a single tool.'

Laboque was a short, thin, wizened man, extremely active, with a ferret's snout and eyes; and he had a wife of his own size, a quick, dusky creature, whose keenness in money-earning was prodigious. They had both begun life at the fairs, dragging with them a hand-cart full of picks, rakes, and saws, which they hawked around. And having opened a little shop at Beauclair ten years back, they had managed to enlarge it each succeeding twelvemonth, and were now at the head of a very important business as middlemen between the factories of the region and the consuming classes. They retailed at great profit the iron of the Abyss, the Chodorges' nails, the Haussers' scythes and sickles, the Mirandes' agricultural appliances. They battered on a waste of wealth and strength with the relative honesty of tradespeople who practised robbery according to established usage, glowing with satisfaction every



evening when they emptied their till and counted up the money that they had amassed, levied as tribute on the needs of others. They were like useless cogwheels in that social machine, which was now fast getting out of order; they made it grate, and they consumed much of its remaining energy.

Whilst the peasant and the ironmonger were disputing furiously over a reduction of a franc which the former demanded, Luc again began to examine the children. There were two in the shop—Auguste, a big, thoughtful-looking boy of twelve, who was learning a lesson, and Eulalie, a little girl, who seemed to be scarcely five years old, and who, grave and gentle, sat quietly on a little chair as if judging all the folk who entered. She had shown an interest in Arsène Lenfant from the moment he crossed the threshold. Finding him to her taste, no doubt, she greeted him like the good-hearted little body she was. And the meeting became complete when a woman entered, bringing a fifth child with her. This woman was Babette, the wife of Bourron the puddler, a plump, round, fresh-looking creature, whose gaiety nothing would ever dim, and who held by the hand her daughter Marthe, a little thing but four years old, who seemed as plump and as gay as herself. The child, it should be said, at once quitted her mother and ran to Auguste Laboque, whom she doubtless knew.

Babette meantime promptly put an end to the bartering between the ironmonger and the peasant, who agreed to halve the franc over which they had been disputing. Then the woman, who had brought back a saucepan purchased the previous day, exclaimed: 'It leaks, Monsieur Laboque. I noticed it directly I put it on the fire. I can't possibly keep a saucepan that leaks, you know.'

Whilst Laboque, fuming, examined the utensil and decided to give another in exchange, Madame Laboque began to speak of her children. They were perfect pests, said she, they never stirred, one from her chair, the other from his books. It was quite necessary to earn money for them, for they were not a bit like their parents, nobody would ever find them up and doing to earn a pile. Meantime Auguste Laboque, listening to nothing, stood smiling at Marthe Bourron, and Eulalie Laboque offered her little hand to Arsène Lenfant, whilst the other Lenfant, 'Olympe, thoughtfully finished eating the cake which little Mitaine had given her. And it was altogether a very pleasant and moving scene.

Instinct with good fresh hope for to-morrow amidst the burning atmosphere of battle and hatred which heated the streets.

'If you think one can gain money with such affairs as this, you are mistaken,' resumed Laboque, handing another saucepan to Babette. 'There are no good workmen left, they all scamp their work nowadays. And what a lot of waste and loss there is in a place like ours! Whoever chooses comes in, and what with having to set some of our goods outside, in the street, it's just like the Fair of Take-what-you-like. We were robbed again this afternoon.'

Lenfant, who was slowly paying for his spade, expressed his astonishment at this. 'So all those robberies one hears about really take place then?' said he.

'Really take place! Of course they do. It isn't we who rob, it's others who rob us. They remained out on strike for two months, you know, and as they haven't the money to buy anything they steal whatever they can. Only a couple of hours ago some clasp-knives and paring-knives were stolen out of that case yonder. It isn't tranquillising by any means.'

And he made a gesture of sudden disquietude, turning pale and quivering as he pointed to the threatening street, crowded with the gloomy throng, as if he feared some hasty onrush, some invasion which might sweep him, the owner and tradesman, away and despoil him of everything.

'Clasp-knives and paring-knives!' repeated Babette with her sempiternal laugh. 'They're not good to eat. What could people do with them? It's just like Caffiaux over the way—he complains that a box of sardines has been stolen from him. Some urchin just wanted to taste them, no doubt.'

She was ever content, ever convinced that things would turn out well. As for that Caffiaux, he was surely a man whom all the housewives ought to have cursed. She had just seen her man Bourron go into his place with Ragu, and Bourron would certainly break up a five-franc piece there. But when all was said it was only natural that a man should amuse himself a bit after toiling so hard. And having given expression to this philosophical view she took her little girl Marthe by the hand again and went off, well pleased with her beautiful new saucepan.

'We ought to have some troops here, you know,' resumed

Laboque, explaining his views to the peasant. 'I'm in favour of giving a good lesson to all those revolutionaries. We need a strong government with a heavy fist to ensure respect for respectable things.'

Lenfant jogged his head. With his distrustful common sense he hesitated to express his opinions. At last he too went off, leading Arsène and Olympe away and saying: 'Well, I hope that all these affairs between the *bourgeois* and the workmen won't end badly.'

For the last minute or two Luc had been examining Caffiaux's establishment over the road, at the other corner of the Rue de Brias and the Place de la Mairie. At first the Caffiaux, man and wife, had simply kept a grocery, which now had a very flourishing appearance with its display of open sacks, its piles of tinned provisions and all sorts of comestible goods protected by netting from the nimble fingers of marauders. Then the idea had come to them of going into the wine business, and they had rented an adjoining shop and had fitted it up as a wine-shop and eating-house, where nowadays they literally coined gold. The hands employed at all the neighbouring works, notably the Abyss, consumed a terrible amount of alcohol. There was an endless procession of them going in and coming out of Caffiaux's establishment, particularly on the Saturdays when they were paid. Many lingered and ate there, and many came away dead drunk. The place was a den of poison, where the strongest lost the use of both their heads and their arms. Thus the idea at once occurred to Luc to enter it to see what might be going on inside. It was a very simple matter; as he was to dine out, he might as well dine there. How many times in Paris had not his passion to learn everything about the 'people,' to dive to the depths of their misery and suffering, impelled him to enter the very worst dens and spend hours in them?

He quietly installed himself at one of the little tables near the huge zinc bar. The room was large, a dozen workmen stood up drinking, whilst others, seated at table, drank, shouted, and played cards, amidst the thick smoke from their pipes, a smoke in which the gas-jets merely looked like red spots. And at the very first glance around him Luc recognised Ragu and Bourron seated face to face at a neighbouring table, and shouting violently at one another. They had doubtless begun by drinking a quart of wine, then they had ordered an omelet, some sausages and some cheese; and the

Quart bottles having followed one after another, they were now very drunk. What particularly interested Luc, however, was the presence of Caffiaux, who stood near their table talking. For his part the young man had ordered a slice of roast beef, and whilst eating it he listened.

Caffiaux was a fat, podgy, smiling man with a paternal face. 'But I tell you,' said he, 'that if you had held out only three days longer you would have had the masters bound hand and foot at your mercy! Curse it all! you're surely not unaware that I'm on the side of you fellows! Yes, indeed, you won't upset all those blackguardly exploiters a bit too soon.'

Ragu and Bourron, who were both greatly excited, clapped him on the arm. Yes, yes, they knew him, they were well aware that he was a good, a true friend. But all the same a strike was too hard to bear, and it always had to come somehow to an end.

'The masters will always be the masters,' stammered Ragu. 'So you see we have got to put up with them, whilst giving them the least we can for their money. Another quart, Caffiaux—you'll help us to drink it, eh?'

Caffiaux did not decline. He sat down. He favoured violent views because he had noticed that his establishment expanded after each successive strike. Nothing made one so thirsty as quarrelling, the worker who was exasperated rushed upon Drink, rageful idleness accustomed toilers to tavern life. Besides, in times of crisis, he, Caffiaux, knew how to be amiable. Feeling certain that he would be repaid, he opened little credit accounts for needy housewives, and did not refuse the men a glass of wine on 'tick,' thus winning the reputation of being good-hearted, and at the same time helping on the consumption of all the poison he retailed. Some folks said, however, that this Caffiaux, with his jesuitical ways, was a traitor, a spy of the masters of the Abyss, who had helped him financially to set up in business, in order that he might make the men chatter whilst he was poisoning them. And it all meant fatal perdition; the wretched, pleasureless, joyless, wage-earning life necessitated the existence of taverns, and taverns finished by rotting the wage-earning class. Briefly, here was a bad man and a bad place, a misery-breeding shop which ought to have been razed to the ground and swept clear away.

Luc's attention was for a moment drawn from the

conversation near him by the opening of an inner door communicating with the grocery shop, and the appearance on the threshold of a pretty girl about fifteen years of age. This was Honorine, the Caffiaux's daughter, a short, slim brunette, with fine black eyes. She never stayed any time in the tavern, but confined herself to serving grocery. And on now entering she merely called her mother, a stout, smiling woman, as unctuous as her husband, who stood behind the large zinc bar. All those tradesfolk, so eager for gain, all those hard egotistical shopkeepers seemed to have very fine children, thought Luc. And would those children for ever and ever remain as grasping, as hard, and as egotistical as their fore-runners?

But all at once a charming and mournful vision appeared before the young man. Amidst the pestilential odours, the thickening tobacco-smoke, the noise of a scuffle which had just broken out before the bar, he saw Josine standing, so vague and blurred, however, that at the first moment he did not recognise her. She must have slipped in furtively, leaving Nanet at the door. Trembling, and still hesitating, she stood behind Ragu, who did not see her; and for a moment Luc was able to scrutinise her, so slim in her wretched gown, and with so gentle and shadowy a face under her ragged *fichu*. But he was struck by something which he had not observed over yonder near the Abyss: her right hand was no longer pressed against her skirt, and he could see that it was strongly bandaged, wrapped round to the wrist with linen, doubtless a bandage for some injury which she had received.

At last Josine mustered up all her courage. She must have followed as far as Caffiaux's shop, have glanced through the windows and have seen Ragu at table. She drew near with her little, faltering step, and laid her girlish hand upon his shoulder. But he, in the glow of his intoxication, did not even feel her touch, and she ended by shaking him until he at last turned round.

'Thunder!' he cried. 'What! is it you again? What to the — do you want here?'

As he spoke he dealt the table such a thump with his fist that the glasses and the quart-bottles fairly danced.

'I have to come, since you don't come home,' she answered, looking very pale and half closing her large frightened eyes in anticipation of some act of brutality.

But Ragu was not listening to her, he was working him-

At into a frantic passion, shouting by way of showing off before all the mates who were present.

'I do what I choose!' he cried, 'and I won't have a woman spying on me! I'm my own master, do you hear? And I shall stop here as long as I please!'

'Then give me the key,' she said despairingly, 'so that at any rate I may not have to spend the night in the street.'

'The key! the key!' shrieked the man, 'you ask me for the key!' And with furious savagery he rose up, caught hold of her by her injured hand and dragged her down the room to throw her into the street.

'Haven't I told you that it's all over, that I don't mean to have anything more to do with you?' he shouted. 'The key, indeed! just go and see if it isn't in the street!'

Josine, bewildered and stumbling, raised a piercing cry of pain. 'Oh! you have hurt me!'

Ragu's violence had torn the bandage from her right hand, and the linen was at once reddened by a large blood-stain. But none the less the man, blinded, maddened by drink, threw the door wide open and pushed the woman into the street. Then returning and falling heavily upon his chair before his glass, he stammered with a husky laugh: 'A fine time of it we should have, and no mistake, if we listened to them!'

Beside himself this time, quite enraged, Luc clenched his fists with the intention of falling upon Ragu. But he foresaw an affray, a useless battle with all those brutes. And feeling suffocated in that vile den he hastened to pay his score, whilst Caffiaux, who had taken his wife's place at the bar, tried to arrange matters by saying in his paternal way that some women were very clumsy. How could one hope to get anything out of a man who had been tippling? Luc, however, without answering, hurried out and inhaled with relief the fresh air of the street, whilst searching among the crowd on all sides, for in leaving the tavern so hastily his one idea had been to rejoin Josine and offer her some help, so that she might not remain perishing of hunger, breadless and homeless, on that black and stormy night. But in vain did he run up the Rue de Brias, return to the Place de la Mairie, dart hither and thither among the groups: Josine and Nanet had disappeared. Terrified perchance by the thought of some pursuit, they had gone to earth somewhere; and the rainy, windy darkness wrapped them round once more.

How frightful was the misery, how hateful were the sufferings to be found in spoilt, corrupted labour, which had become the vile ferment whence every degradation sprang! With his heart bleeding, his mind clouded by the blackest apprehensions, Luc again wandered through the threatening crowd whose numbers still increased in the Rue de Brias. He once more found there that vague atmosphere of terror which had come from the recent struggle between the classes, a struggle which never finished, whose near return one could scent in the very air. That resumption of work was but a deceptive peace, there was low growling amidst all the resignation of the toilers, a silent craving for revenge; their eyes still retained a gleam of ferocity, and were ready to flash once more. On both sides of the way were taverns full of men; drink was consuming their pay, poisonous exhalations were pouring into the very street, whilst the shops never emptied, but still and ever levied on the meagre resources of the housewives that iniquitous and monstrous tribute called 'commercial gain.' Everywhere, upon every side the toilers, the starvelings, were exploited, preyed upon, caught and crushed in the works of the ever-grating social machine, whose teeth proved all the harder now that it was falling to pieces. And in the mud, under the wildly flickering gaslights, as on the eve of some great catastrophe, all Beauclair came and went, tramping about like a lost flock, going blindly towards the pit of destruction.

Among the crowd Luc recognised several persons whom he had seen on the occasion of his first visit to Beauclair during the previous spring. The authorities were there, for fear no doubt of something being amiss. He saw Mayor Gourier and Sub-Prefect Châtelard pass on together. The first, a nervous man of large property, would have liked to have troops in the town; but the second, an amiable waif of Parisian life whose intellect was sharper, had wisely contented himself with the services of the gendarmes. Gaume, the presiding judge of the local court, also went by, accompanied by Captain Jollivet, an officer on the retired list, who was about to marry his daughter. And as they passed Laboquer's shop they paused to exchange greetings with the Mazelles, some former tradespeople who, thanks to a rapidly acquired income, had finally been received into the high society of the town. All these folks spoke in low voices, with scarcely confident expressions on their faces, as they glanced sideways

at the heavily tramping toilers who were still keeping up Saturday evening. As Luc passed near the Mazelles he heard them also speaking of the robberies, as if questioning the Judge and the Captain on the subject. Tittle-tattle was indeed flying from mouth to mouth. A five-franc piece had been taken from Dacheux's till; a box of sardines had been abstracted from Caffiaux's shop; but the gravest commentaries were those to which the theft of Laboque's paring-knives gave rise. The terror which was in the air gained upon sensible people. Was it true then that the revolutionaries were arming themselves, and purposed carrying out some massacre that very night, that stormy night which hung so heavily over Beauclair? That disastrous strike had put everything out of gear, hunger was impelling wretches hither and thither, the poisonous alcohol of the taverns was breeding destructive and murderous madness. Truly enough, right along the filthy, muddy roadway, along the sticky foot-pavements one found all the poisonousness and degradation that come from iniquitous toil, the toil of the greater number for the enjoyment of the few—labour, dishonoured, hated, and cursed, the frightful misery that results therefrom, together with theft and prostitution which are its monstrous parasitic growths. Pale girls passed by, factory girls whom some unprincipled men had led astray and who had afterwards sunk to the gutter; and drunken men went off with them through all the puddles and the darkness.

Increasing compassion, rebellion compounded of grief and anger, took possession of Luc. Where could Josine be? In what horrid dark nook had she sought refuge with little Nanet? But all at once a clamour arose, a hurricane seemed to sweep over the crowd first, making it whirl and then carrying it away. One might have thought that an attack was being made upon the shops, that the provisions exposed for sale on either side of the street were being pillaged.

Gendarmes rushed forward, there was scampering hither and thither, a loud clatter of boots and of sabres. What was the matter? What was the matter? Questions pressed one upon the other, flew about in stammering accents amidst the growing terror, whilst answers came back wildly from every side.

At last Luc heard the Mazelles saying, as they retraced their steps, 'It's a child who has stolen a loaf of bread.'

The snarling, excited crowd was now rushing up the



street. The affair must have taken place at Mitaine's shop. Women shrieked, an old man fell down and had to be picked up. One fat gendarme ran so impetuously through the groups that he upset two persons.

Luc himself began to run, carried away by the general panic. And as he passed near Judge Gaume he heard him saying slowly to Captain Jollivet: 'It's a child who has stolen a loaf of bread.'

That answer came back again, punctuated as it were by the rush of the crowd. But there was a great deal of scrambling and nothing could yet be seen. The tradespeople standing on the thresholds of their shops turned pale, and thought of putting up their shutters. A jeweller was already removing the watches from his window. Meantime, a general eddying took place around the fat gendarme, who was busy exerting his elbows.

Then Luc, beside whom Mayor Gourier and Sub-Prefect Châtelard were also running, again detected the words, the pitiful murmur rising amidst a little shudder: 'It's a child who has stolen a loaf of bread.'

At last, as the young man was just reaching Mitaine's shop in the wake of the fat gendarme, he saw him rush forward to assist a comrade, a long, lanky gendarme, who was roughly holding a boy, between five and six years old, by the wrist. And in this boy Luc at once recognised Nanet, with his fair tumbled head, which he still carried erect with the resolute air of a little man. He had just stolen a loaf of bread from beautiful Madame Mitaine's open window. The theft could not be denied, for the lad was still holding the big loaf, which was nearly as tall as himself. And so it was really this childish act of larceny which had upset and excited the whole Rue de Brias. Some passers-by having noticed it had denounced it to the gendarme, who had set off at a run. But the lad on his side had slipped away very fast, disappearing among the groups, and the gendarme, raising a perfect hullabaloo in his desperation, had nearly turned all Beauclair topsy-turvy. He was triumphant now, for he had captured the culprit, and had brought him back to the scene of the theft to confound him.

'It's a child who has stolen a loaf of bread,' the people repeated.

Madame Mitaine, astonished at such an uproar, had come once more to the door of her shop. And she was quite

thunder-struck when the gendarme, addressing her, exclaimed : 'This is the young vagabond who just stole a loaf of yours, madame.'

Then he gave Nanet a shake in order to frighten him. 'You'll go to gaol, you know,' he said. 'Why did you steal that loaf, eh?'

But the little fellow was not put out. He answered clearly, in his flute-like voice : 'I've had nothing to eat since yesterday, nor my sister either.'

Meantime Madame Mitaine had recovered her self-possession. She was looking at the little lad with her beautiful eyes so full of indulgent kindness. Poor little devil ! And his sister, where had he left her ? For a moment the baker's wife hesitated, whilst a slight flush rose to her cheeks. Then, with the amiable laugh of a handsome woman accustomed to be courted by all her customers, she said in her gay quiet way : 'You are mistaken, gendarme—that child didn't steal the loaf, I gave it him.'

Without relaxing his hold on Nanet, the gendarme stood before her, gaping. Ten people had seen the boy take the loaf and run off with it. And all at once butcher Dacheux, who had crossed the street, intervened, in a furious passion. 'But I saw him myself. I was looking this way at the very moment. He threw himself on the biggest of the loaves, and then took to his heels. That's how it happened. As true as I was robbed of five francs the day before yesterday, as true as Laboque and Caffiaux have been robbed to-day, that little vermin has just robbed you, Madame Mitaine, and you can't deny it.'

Quite pink from having told a fib, the baker's wife none the less repeated gently : 'You are mistaken, neighbour, it was I who gave the child that loaf. He did not steal it.'

Then, as Dacheux flew into a temper with her, predicting that by her foolish indulgence she would end by having them all pillaged and massacred, Sub-Prefect Châtelard, who had judged the scene at a glance like a shrewd man, approached the gendarme and made him release Nanet, to whom, in a loud, ogre-like whisper, he said : 'Off with you quick, youngster.'

The crowd was already growling. Why, the baker's wife herself declared that she had given the boy the loaf ! A poor little beggar, no higher than a jack-boot, who had been fasting since the previous day ! Exclamations and hisses

arose, and suddenly a thunderous voice made itself heard above every other.

'Ah! curse it! so little urchins six years old have to set us the example now? The child did right. 'When one's hungry one may take whatever one wants! Yes, everything in the shops is ours, and if you are all starving it's simply because you are cowards!'

The throng swayed about and eddied back, as when a paving-stone is flung into a pond. 'Who is it?' people asked. And at once came back replies, 'It's Lange, the potter.' Amidst the groups which drew aside, Luc then saw the man who had spoken, a short, thick-set man, barely five-and-twenty, with a square-shaped head, bushy with black hair and beard. Of a rustic appearance but with a glow of intelligence in his eyes, he went on speaking, proclaiming the dream of his life aloud, in soaring but unpolished language, like a poet yet in the rough. And he made no gestures, but quietly kept his hands in his pockets.

'Provisions and money and houses and clothes,' said he; 'they have all been stolen from us, and we have a right to take them all back! And not to-morrow, but this very evening, if we were men, we ought to resume possession of the soil, the mines, the factories, all Beauclair indeed! There are no two ways of doing it, there is only one—to throw the whole edifice on the ground at one blow, to poleaxe and destroy authority everywhere, so that the people, to whom everything belongs, may at last build up the world anew!'

Women took fright on hearing this. Even the men, in presence of the aggressive vehemence of Lange's words, became silent and retreated, anxious as to the consequences. Few of them really understood, the greater number, beneath the century-old grinding bondage of the wage-earning system, had not as yet reached such a degree of embittered rebellion. What was the good of it? They would none the less die of starvation and go to prison, they thought.

'Oh! you don't dare, I know it!' continued Lange, with terrible sarcasm. 'But there are others who will dare some day. Your Beauclair will be blown up unless it falls to pieces from sheer rottenness. Your noses can't be worth much if you are unable to smell this evening that everything's rotten, and stinks of putrefaction! There is only so much dung left; and one doesn't need to be a great prophet to

predict that the wind which blows will some day sweep away the town and all the thieves and all the murderers, our masters! Ah! may everything tumble down and break to pieces! To death, to death with all of it!

The scandal was becoming so great that Sub-Prefect Châtelard, though he would have preferred to treat the matter with indifference, found himself obliged to exercise his authority. Somebody had to be arrested, so three gendarmes sprang upon Lange, and led him off down a gloomy, deserted side street, where their heavy footfalls died away. The crowd itself had shown but vague, contradictory impulses, which were promptly quieted. And the gathering was broken up and the tramping began afresh, slow and silent through the black mud from one to the other end of the street.

But Luc had shuddered. That prophetic threat had burst forth like the frightful fated outcome of all that he had seen, all that he had heard, since the fall of daylight. Such an abundance of iniquity and wretchedness called for a final catastrophe, which he himself felt approaching from the depths beyond the horizon, in the form perchance of some avenging cloud of fire which would consume and raze Beauclair to the ground. And with his horror of all violence Luc suffered at the thought of it. What! could the potter be right? Would force, would theft and murder, be necessary for mankind to find itself once more within the pale of justice? In his distracted state it had seemed to Luc that, amidst all the harsh, sombre faces of the toilers, he had seen the pale countenances of Mayor Gourier, Judge Gaume, and Captain Jollivet flit past him. Then, too, the faces of the Mazelles, perspiring with terror, darted by in the flickering light of a gas-lamp. The street horrified him, and only one compassionate consolatory thought remained, that of overtaking Nanet, following him, and ascertaining into what dark nook the unhappy Josine had fallen.

The lad was walking on and on with all the courage of his little legs. Luc, who had seen him go off up the Rue de Brias in the direction of the Abyss, overtook him fairly rapidly, for the dear little fellow had great difficulty in carrying his big loaf. He pressed it to his chest with both his hands, from fear of dropping it, and from fear too lest some evil-hearted man or some big dog might tear it from him. On hearing Luc's hasty footsteps in the rear, he no doubt felt extremely frightened, for he attempted to run. But on

glancing round he recognised by the light of one of the last gas-lamps the gentleman who had smiled at him and his big sister, and thereupon he felt reassured, and allowed himself to be overtaken.

'Shall I carry your loaf for you?' the young man asked.

'Oh, no! I want to keep it. It pleases me,' said the boy.

They were now on the high road beyond Beauclair, in the darkness falling from the low and stormy sky. The lights of the Abyss alone gleamed forth some distance off. And one could hear the child splashing through the mud, whilst he raised his loaf as high as possible, so that it might not get dirty.

'You know where you are going?' asked Luc.

'Of course.'

'Is it very far?'

'No—it's somewhere.'

A vague fear must have been stealing over Nanet again, for his steps slackened. Why did the gentleman want to know? Feeling that he was his big sister's only protector, the little man sought to devise some ruse. But Luc, who guessed his feelings, and wished to show him that he was a friend, began to play with him, catching him in his arms at the moment when he narrowly missed stumbling in a puddle.

'Look out, my boy! You mustn't get any mud-jam on your bread.'

Conquered, having felt the affectionate warmth of those big brotherly arms, Nanet burst into the careless laugh of childhood and said to his new friend: 'Oh! you are strong and kind, you are!'

Then he went trotting on, without showing further disquietude. But where could Josine have hidden herself? The road stretched out, and in the motionless shadow of each successive tree Luc fancied he could see her waiting. He was drawing near the Abyss, the ground already shook with the heavy blows of the steam-hammer, whilst the surroundings were illumined by a fiery cloud of vapour traversed by the broad rays of the electric lights. Nanet, without going past the Abyss, turned towards the bridge and crossed the Mionne. Thus Luc found himself brought back to the very spot where he had first met the boy and his sister earlier in the evening. But all at once the lad rushed

off, and the young man lost sight of him and heard him call, whilst once more laughing playfully :

‘Here, big sister, here big sister ! look at this, see how fine it is.’

Beyond the bridge the river bank became lower, and a bench stood there in the shadow cast by some palings facing the Abyss, which smoked and panted on the other side of the water. Luc had just knocked against the palings when he heard the urchin’s laughter turn into cries and tears. He took his bearings, and understood everything when he perceived Josine lying exhausted, in a swoon, upon the bench. She had fallen there overcome by hunger and suffering, letting her little brother go off, and scarcely understanding what he, with the boldness of a lad of the streets, had intended to do. And now the child, finding her cold, as if lifeless, sobbed loudly and despairingly.

‘Oh ! big sister, wake up, wake up ! You must eat, do eat, there’s bread now.’

Tears had come to Luc’s eyes also. To think that so much misery, such a frightful destiny of privation and suffering, should fall upon such weak yet courageous creatures ! He quickly descended to the Mionne, dipped his handkerchief in the water, and came back and applied it to Josine’s temples. Fortunately that tragic night was not a very cold one. At last he took hold of the young woman’s hands, rubbed them, and warmed them with his own ; and finally she sighed and seemed to awaken from some black dream. But in her prostrate condition, due to lack of food, nothing astonished her ; it appeared to her quite natural that her brother should be there with that loaf, accompanied too by that tall and handsome gentleman, whom she recognised. Perhaps she imagined that it was the gentleman who had brought the bread. Her poor weak fingers could not break the crust. He had to help her break the bread into little pieces, which he passed her slowly, one by one, so that she might not choke herself in her haste to quiet the atrocious hunger which gripped her. And then the whole of her poor, thin, spare figure began to tremble, and she wept, wept on unceasingly whilst still eating, thus moistening each mouthful with her tears ere she devoured it voraciously, evincing the while the shivering clumsiness of some eager beaten animal which no longer knows how to swallow. Luc, distracted, with a pang at his heart, gently restrained her hands whilst still giving

her the little pieces which he broke off the loaf. Never could he afterwards forget that communion of suffering and kindness, that bread of life thus given to the most woeful and sweetest of human creatures.

Nanet, meantime, broke off his own share, and ate like a little glutton, proud of his exploit. His sister's tears astonished him—why did she still weep when they were feasting? Then, having finished, quite oppressed by his ravenous feast, he nestled close beside her and was overpowered by sudden somnolence, the happy sleep of childhood, which beholds the angels in its dreams. And Josine pressed him to her with her right arm, leaning back against the bench and feeling a trifle stronger, whilst Luc remained seated by her side, unable to leave her like that alone in the night with that sleeping child. He had understood at last that some of the clumsiness that she had shown in eating had been due to her injured hand, around which, as well as she could manage, she had again wound her bloodstained bandage.

'You have injured yourself?' he said.

'Yes, monsieur, a boot-stitching machine broke one of my fingers and I had to have it cut off. But it was my fault, so the foreman said, though Monsieur Gourier gave me fifty francs.'

She spoke in a somewhat low and very gentle voice, which trembled at moments as with a kind of shame.

'So you worked at the boot-factory belonging to Monsieur Gourier, the Mayor?'

'Yes, monsieur, I first went there when I was fifteen—I'm eighteen now. My mother worked there more than twenty years, but she is dead. I'm all alone, I've only my little brother, Nanet, who is just six. My name's Josine.'

And she went on telling her story, in such wise that Luc only had to ask a few more questions to learn everything. It was the commonplace, distressful story of so many poor girls; a father who goes off with another woman, a mother who remains stranded with four children, for whom she is unable to earn sufficient food. Although she luckily loses two of them, she dies at last from the effect of over-work, and then the daughter, just sixteen years of age, has to become a mother to her little brother, in her turn killing herself with hard work, though at times she is unable to earn bread enough for herself and the boy. Then comes the inevitable tragedy which dogs the footsteps of a good-looking workgirl—a seducer passes, the rakish Ragu, on

whose arm she imprudently strolls each Sunday after the dance. He makes her such fine promises, she already pictures herself married, with a pretty home, in which she brings up her brother together with the children that may come to her. Her only fault is that one evening in springtime she stumbles; how it was she hardly remembers. And six months later she is guilty of a second fault, that of going to live with Ragu, who speaks no more to her of marriage. Then her accident befalls her at the boot-works, and she finds herself unable to continue working at the very moment when the strike has rendered Ragu so rageful and spiteful that he has begun to beat her, accusing her of being the cause of his own misery. And from that moment things go from bad to worse, and now he has turned her into the street, and will not even give her the key so that she may go home to bed with Nanet.

Whilst the girl went on talking it seemed to Luc that if she should have a child by Ragu he might become attached to her and make up his mind to marry her. However, when the young man hinted this to Josine she speedily undeceived him. No, nothing of that was at all likely. Then silence fell, they no longer spoke. The certainty that Josine was not a mother, that she would never bear children to that man Ragu, brought Luc, amidst his dolorous compassion, a singular feeling of relief, for which he was unable to account. Vague ideas arose in his mind, whilst his eyes wandered far away over the dim scene before him, and he again discerned that gorge of Brias which he had viewed in the twilight before it was steeped in shadows. On either side where the Bleuse Mountains reared their flights of rocks the darkness became more dense. Midway up the height behind him the young man now and again heard the passing rumble of a train which whistled and slowed down as it approached the station. At his feet he distinguished the glaucous Mionne, rippling against the stockade whose beams upheld the bridge. And then, on his left, came the sudden widening of the gorge, the two promontories of the Bleuse Mountains drawing aside on the verge of the vast Roumagne plain, where the tempestuous night rolled on like a black and endless sea beyond the vague eyot of Beauclair, where constellated hundreds of little lights, suggesting sparks.

But Luc's eyes ever came back to the Abyss in front of him. It showed forth like some weird apparition under



clouds of white smoke, fired, so it seemed, by the electric lamps in the yards. Through open doorways and other apertures one at times perceived the blazing mouths of the furnaces, with now a blinding flow of fusing metal, now a huge ruddy glare; all the internal, hellish flames indeed of the monster's devouring, tumultuous work. The ground quaked all around, whilst the ringing dance of the tilt-hammers never ceased to sound above the dull rumbling of the machinery, and the deep blows of the great steam-hammers, which suggested a far-away cannonade.

And Luc, with his eyes full of that vision, his heart lacerated by the thought of the fate that had befallen that hapless Josine, now reclining in utter abandonment and wretchedness on that bench beside him, said to himself that in this poor creature resounded the whole collapse of labour, evilly organised, dishonoured, and accursed. In that supreme suffering, in that human sacrifice ended all his experiences of the evening, the disasters of the strike, the hatred poisoning men's hearts and minds, the egotistical harshness of trade, the triumph of drink which had become necessary to stimulate forgetfulness, the legitimization of theft by hunger, the cracking and rending of old-time society beneath the very weight of its own iniquities. And he fancied that he could again hear Lange predicting the final catastrophe which would sweep away that Beauclair, which was rotten itself and which rotted everything that came in contact with it. And he saw once more also the pale girls wandering over the pavement, those sorry offspring of manufacturing towns, where the vile wage-system invariably brings about the ruin of the better-looking factory hands. Was it not to a similar fate that Josine herself was drifting? He could divine that she was a submissive, a loving creature, one of those tender natures that give courage to the strong and prove their reward. And the thought of abandoning her on that bench, of doing nothing to save her from accursed fate, filled him with such revolt, that he would have for ever reproached himself had he not offered her a helping and a brotherly hand.

'Come, you cannot sleep here with that child,' he said. 'That man must take you back. For the rest we'll see afterwards. Where do you live?'

'Near by, in the Rue des Trois Lunes, in Old Beauclair,' she replied.

Then she explained things to him. Ragu occupied a little

lodging of three rooms in the same house as one of his sisters, Adèle, nicknamed *La Toupe*. And she suspected that if Ragu really had not got the key with him, he must have handed it to *La Toupe*, who was a terrible creature. When the young man spoke of quietly going to her and asking her for the key, Josine shuddered.

'Oh, no! you must not ask her. She hates me. \* If one could only come upon her husband, who's a good-natured man, but I know that he works at the Abyss to-night. He's a master puddler, named *Bonnaire*.'

'*Bonnaire*!' Luc repeated, a recollection awakening within him; 'why I saw him when I visited the Abyss last spring. I even had a long talk with him—he explained the work to me. He's an intelligent fellow, and, as you say, he seemed to me to be good-natured. Well, it's quite simple, I will go and speak to him about you.'

Josine raised a cry of heartfelt gratitude; she was trembling from head to foot, and she clasped her hands as her whole being went out towards the young man. 'Oh! monsieur, how good you are!—how can I ever thank you!'

A sombre glow was now rising from the Abyss, and Luc, as he glanced at her, saw her, this time bare-headed, for her ragged wrapper had fallen over her shoulders. She was no longer weeping, her blue eyes gleamed with tenderness, and her little mouth had found once more its youthful smile. With her supple graceful slimness she had retained quite a childish air, she looked like one who was still playful, simple, and gay. Her long fair hair, of the hue of ripe oats, had fallen, half unbound, over the nape of her neck, and lent her quite a girlish and candid appearance in her abandonment. He, infinitely charmed, by degrees quite captivated, felt moved and astonished at the sight of the winning creature that seemed to emerge from the poor beggarly being whom he had met badly clad, frightened, and weeping. And, besides, she looked at him with so much adoration, she surrendered to him so candidly her soul, like one who at last felt herself succoured and loved. Handsome and kind as he was, he seemed to her a very god after all the brutality of Ragu. She would have kissed his very footprints; and she stood before him with her hands still clasped, the left pressing the right, the mutilated hand round which was wrapped the blood-stained bandage. And something very sweet and very

strong seemed to bind her and him together, a link of infinite tenderness, infinite affection.

'Nanet will take you to the works, monsieur,' she said; 'he knows every corner of them.'

'No, no, I know my way. Don't awake him, he will keep you warm. Wait here for me quietly, both of you.'

He left her on the bench, in the black night, with the sleeping child. And as he stepped away a great glow illumined the promontory of the Bleuse Mountains on the right above the park of La Cr  cherie, where stood Jordan's house. The sombre silhouette of the blast furnace could be seen on the mountain side. A 'run' of metal flowed forth, and all the neighbouring rocks, even all the roofs of Beauclair, were illumined by it as by some bright red dawn.

## II

BONNAIRE, the master puddler, one of the best hands of the works, had played an important part in the recent strike. A man of just mind, indignant with the iniquity of the wage-earning system, he read the Paris newspapers and derived from them a revolutionary education in which there were many gaps, but which had made him a fairly frank partisan of Collectivist doctrines. As he himself, with the fine equilibrium of a hard-working healthy man, very reasonably said, Collectivism was the dream whose realisation they would some day seek; and meantime it was necessary to secure as much justice as might be immediately obtained in order to reduce the sufferings of the workers to a minimum.

The strike had been for some time inevitable. Three years previously, the Abyss having nearly come to grief in the hands of Monsieur J  r  me's son, Michel Qurignon, the latter's son-in-law, Boisg  lin, an idler, a fine Paris gentleman, had purchased the works, investing in them all that remained of his jeopardised fortune on the advice of a poor cousin, a certain Delaveau, who had positively undertaken to make the capital invested yield a profit of thirty per cent. per annum. And for three years Delaveau, a skilful engineer and a determined hard worker, had kept his promise, thanks to energetic management and organisation, strict attention to the minutest details, and absolute discipline on all sides. Michel Qurignon's ill success in business had been partly due

to the difficulties which had beset the metal market of the region ever since the manufacture of iron rails and girders had there ceased to be remunerative, owing to the discovery of certain chemical processes which in Northern and Eastern France had enabled ironmasters to make use very cheaply of large quantities of ore which previously had been regarded as too defective. The Beauclair works could not possibly turn out the same class of goods so cheaply as their competitors; ruin therefore seemed inevitable, and Delaveau's stroke of talent consisted in changing the character of the output, in giving up the manufacture of rails and girders which Northern and Eastern France could supply at twenty centimes the kilogramme,<sup>1</sup> and confining himself to the manufacture of high-class things, such indeed as projectiles and ordnance, shells and cannon, which brought in from two to three francs per kilogramme. Prosperity had then returned, and Boisgelin's investment brought him in a considerable income. Only it had been necessary to obtain a quantity of new plant, and to secure the services of more careful and attentive workmen, who necessarily required to be better paid than others.

In principle the strike had been brought about by that very question of better pay. The men were paid by the hundred kilogrammes,<sup>2</sup> and Delaveau himself admitted the necessity of a new wage tariff. But he wished to remain absolute master of the situation, desiring above all things to avoid anything which might seem like surrender on his part to the pressure of his workpeople. With a specialist mind, very authoritative in disposition, and stubborn with respect to his rights, whilst striving to be just and loyal, he regarded Collectivism as a destructive dream, and declared that any such utopian doctrine would lead one direct to the most awful catastrophes. The quarrel on this point between him and the little world of workers over whom he reigned became a fierce one directly Bonnaire succeeded in setting a defensive syndicate on foot. For if Delaveau admitted the desirability of relief and pension funds, and even of co-operative societies supplying cheap provisions and other necessities, thus recognising that the workman was not forbidden to improve his position, he at the same time violently condemned all syndicates and class grouping designed for collective action.

From that moment then the struggle began; Delaveau

<sup>1</sup> That is about 1*d.* per pound.

<sup>2</sup> 220½ lbs.

showed great unwillingness to complete the revision of the tariffs, and thought it necessary in his turn to arm himself, in some measure, decreeing a 'state of siege' at the Abyss. Soon after he had begun to act thus rigorously the men complained that no individual liberty was left to them. A close watch was kept on them, on their thoughts and opinions as well as on their actions, even outside the works. Those who put on a humble flattering manner and perchance became spies, gained the management's good graces, whilst the proud and independent were treated as dangerous men. And as the manager was by instinct a staunch conservative, a defender of the existing order of things, and openly evinced the resolve to have none but men of his own views in the place, all the underlings, the engineers, foremen, and inspectors strove to surpass one another in energy, displaying implacable severity with regard to obedience, and what they chose to call 'a proper spirit.'

Bonnaire, hurt in his opinions, his craving for liberty and justice, naturally found himself at the head of the malcontents. It was he who with a few mates waited on Delaveau to acquaint him with their complaints. He spoke out very plainly, and, indeed, exasperated the manager without obtaining the rise in wages that he asked for. Delaveau did not believe in the possibility of a general strike among his hands, for the metal workers do not readily lose their tempers, and for many years there had been no strike at all at the Abyss, whereas among the pitmen of the coal mines of Brias strikes broke out continually. When, therefore, contrary to Delaveau's anticipations, a general strike did occur among his own men, when one morning only two hundred out of a thousand presented themselves at the works, which he had to close, his resentment was so great that he stubbornly held to the course he had chosen and refused to make the slightest concession. When Bonnaire and a deputation of the syndicate ventured to go to him he began by turning them out of doors. He was the master, the quarrel was between his workmen and himself, and he intended to settle it with his workmen and with nobody else. Bonnaire therefore returned to see him accompanied only by three mates. But all that they could obtain from him were arguments and calculations, tending to show that the prosperity of the Abyss would be compromised if he should increase the men's wages. Funds had been confided to him, a factory had been

given him to manage, and it was his duty to see that the factory paid its way and that the funds yielded the promised rate of interest. He was certainly disposed to be humane, but he considered that it was the duty of an honest man to keep his engagements, and extract from the enterprise he directed the largest amount of gain possible. All the rest, in his opinion, was visionary, wild hope, dangerous utopia. And thus, each side becoming more and more stubborn after several similar interviews, the strike lasted for two long months, full of disasters for the wage-earners as well as for the owner, increasing as it did the misery of the men whilst the plant was damaged by neglect and idleness. At last the contending parties consented to make certain mutual concessions, and came to an agreement respecting a new tariff. But throughout another week Delaveau refused to take back certain workmen, whom he called the 'leaders,' and among whom, of course, was Bonnaire. The manager harboured very rancorous feelings towards the latter, although he recognised that he was one of the most skilful and most sober of his hands. When he ultimately gave way, and took Bonnaire back with the others, he declared that he was being compelled to act in this manner against his inclinations, solely from a desire to restore peace.

From that moment Bonnaire felt that he was condemned. Under such circumstances he was at first absolutely unwilling to go back to the works at all. But he was a great favourite with his mates, and when they declared that they would not return unless he resumed work at the same time as themselves, he appeared to resign himself to their wishes, in order that he might not prove the cause of some fresh rupture. In his estimation, however, his mates had suffered quite enough; he had fully made up his mind and intended to sacrifice himself in order that none other might have to pay the penalty of the semi-victory which had been gained. And thus, although he had ended by returning to work on the Thursday, it had been with the intention of taking himself off on the ensuing Sunday, for he was convinced that his presence at the Abyss was no longer possible. He took none of his friends into his confidence, but simply warned the management on Saturday morning of his intention to leave. If he were still working at the Abyss that night it was solely because he wished to finish a job which he had begun. He desired to disappear in a quiet, honest way.

Luc having given his name to the door porter, inquired if he could speak to master-puddler Bonnaire; and the porter in reply contented himself with pointing out the hall where the puddling-furnaces and rolling-machines were installed at the further end of the second yard on the left. The yards, soaked by the recent rain, formed a perfect cloaca, what with their uneven paving-stones and their tangle of rails, amongst which passed a branch line connecting the works with Beauclair railway station. Under the lunar-like brightness of a few electric lamps, amongst the shadows cast by the sheds and the plunging tower, and the vaguely outlined cementing furnaces, which suggested the conical temples of some barbarous religion, a little engine was slowly moving about and sending forth shrill whistles of warning in order that nobody might be run over. But what more particularly deafened the visitor from the moment he crossed the threshold was the beating of a couple of tilt-hammers installed in a kind of cellar. Their big heads—the heads, it seemed, of voracious beasts—could be seen striking the iron with a furious rhythm; they bit it, as it were, and stretched it into bars with all the force of their desperate metal teeth. The workmen beside them led calm and silent lives, communicating with one another by gestures only amidst the everlasting uproar and trepidation. Luc, after skirting a low building where some other tilt-hammers were also working ragefully, turned to the left and crossed the second yard whose ravaged soil was littered with pieces of scrap metal, slumbering in the mud until collected for re-casting. A railway truck was being laden with a large piece of wrought work, a shaft for a torpedo boat, which had been finished that very day, and which the little engine was about to remove. As this engine came up whistling, Luc, in order to avoid it, took a pathway between some symmetrically disposed piles of pig-iron, and in this wise reached the hall of the puddling-furnaces and the rolling-machines.

This hall or gallery, one of the largest of the works, resounded in the daytime with the terrible rumbling of the rollers. But the latter were now at rest, and more than half of the huge place was steeped in darkness. Of the ten puddling-furnaces only four were at work, served by two forge-hammers. Here and there a meagre gas-light flickered in the draught; huge shadows filled the place; one could scarcely distinguish the great smoked beams upholding the roof above. A sound of dripping water emerged from the

darkness; the beaten ground which served as a flooring—all bumps and hollows—was in one part so much fetid mud, in another so much coal-dust, in another, again, a mass of waste stuff. On every side one noticed the filth of joyless labour, a labour hated and accursed, performed in a black, ruinous, ignoble den, pestilential with smoke and grimy with the dirt of every kind that flew through the air. From the nails driven into some little huts of rough boards hung the workmen's town-clothes, mixed with linen vests and leather aprons. And all that dense misery was only brightened when some master puddler happened to open the door of his furnace, whence emerged a blinding flow of light which, like the beaming of some planet, transpierced the darkness of the entire gallery.

When Luc presented himself Bonnaire was for the last time stirring some fusing metal—some four hundred and forty pounds' weight of cast iron, which the furnace and human labour between them were to turn into steel. The whole operation of steel puddling required four hours, and this stirring at the expiration of the first hours of waiting was the hardest part of the work. Grasping an iron rod of fifty pounds' weight and standing in the broiling glare, the master puddler stirred the incandescent metal on the sole of the furnace. With the help of the hook at the end of his bar he raked the depths and kneaded the huge sun-like ball or 'bloom,' at which he alone was able to gaze, with his eyes hardened to the intense glow. And he had to gaze at it, since it was by its colour that he ascertained what stage the work had reached. When he withdrew his bar the latter was a bright red, and threw out sparks on all sides.

With a motion of his hand Bonnaire now signed to his stoker to quicken the fire, whilst another workman, the companion puddler, took up a bar in order to do a stir in his turn.

'You are Monsieur Bonnaire, are you not?' asked Luc, drawing near.

The master puddler seemed surprised at being thus accosted, but nodded affirmatively. He looked superb with his white neck and pink face full of victorious strength amidst the glare of his work.

Scarcely five-and-thirty years of age, he was a giant of fair complexion, with close-cropped hair and a broad,



massive, placid face. His large firm mouth and big peaceful eyes expressed great rectitude and kindliness.

'I don't know if you recognise me,' Luc continued, 'but I saw you here last summer and had a talk with you.'

'Quite so,' the master puddler at last replied; 'you are a friend of Monsieur Jordan.'

When, however, the young man with some embarrassment explained the motive of his visit, how he had seen the unhappy Josine cast into the street, and how it seemed that he, Bonnaire, could alone do something for her, the workman relapsed into silence, looking embarrassed on his side also. Neither spoke for a time; there came an interval of waiting, prolonged by the noise of the forge-hammer near them. And when the master puddler was at last able to make himself heard he simply said: 'All right, I'll do what I can—I'll go with you as soon as I've finished, in about three-quarters of an hour.'

Although it was nearly eleven o'clock already, Luc resolved to wait; and at first he began to take some interest in a cutting-machine, which in a dark corner near at hand was cutting bar-steel with as much quiet ease as if steel were butter. At each motion of the machine's jaws, a little piece of metal fell, and a heap was soon formed, ready to be carried in a barrow into the charging-chamber, where each charge of sixty-six pounds' weight was made up in order to be removed to the adjacent hall, where the crucible furnaces were installed. And with the view of occupying his time, attracted as he was by the great pink glow which filled that hall, Luc entered it.

It was a very large and lofty place, as badly kept, as grimy and as much out of repair as the other. And on a level with the bossy ground, littered with scrap, were the openings of six batteries of furnaces, each divided into three compartments. Those narrow, long, glaring pits whose brick walls occupied the whole basement, were heated by a mixture of air and flaming gas, which the head caster himself regulated by means of a mechanical fan. Thus, streaking the beaten ground of the shadowy hall, there appeared six slits, open above the internal hell, the ever-active volcano, whose subterranean brazier could be heard rumbling loudly. Covers, shaped like long slabs, bricks bound together by an iron armature, were laid across the furnaces. But these covers did not join, and from each intervening space sprang

an intense pinkish light, so many sunrises as it were, broad rays starting from the soil and darting in a sheaf to the dusty glass of the roofing. And whenever a man, according to the requirements of the work, removed one or another of the covers, one might have thought that some planet was emerging from all obstacles, for the hall was then irradiated by a brightness like that of aurora.

It so happened that Luc was able to see the operations. Some workmen were loading a furnace, and he saw them lower the crucibles of refractory clay, which had previously been heated till they were red, and then by means of a funnel, pour in the charges, sixty-six pounds of metal for each crucible. For some three or four hours fusion would be in progress, and then the crucibles would have to be removed and emptied, which was the terrible part of the work. As Luc drew near to another furnace, where some men provided with long bars had just assured themselves that the fusion was perfect, he recognised Fauchard in the drawer whose duty it was to remove the crucibles. Livid and withered, with a bony, scorched face, Fauchard had none the less retained strong herculean arms and legs. Physically deformed by the terrible labour—ever the same—which he had been performing for fourteen years already, he had suffered yet more considerably in his intelligence from the machine-like life to which he had been condemned: perpetually repeating the same movements, without need of thought or individuality of action, becoming as it were merely an element of the struggle with fire. His physical defects, the rise of his shoulders, the hypertrophy of his limbs, the scorching of his eyes, which had paled from constant exposure to flaming light, were not his only blemishes—he was also conscious of intellectual downfall; for caught in the monster's grasp at sixteen years of age, after a rudimentary education suddenly cut short, he remembered that he had once possessed intelligence, an intelligence which was now flickering and departing under the relentless burden of a labour which he performed like some blinded beast crushed down by destructive baleful toil. And he now had but one sole craving, one sole delight, which was to drink—to drink his four quarts of wine at each shift, to drink so that the furnace might not burn up his baked skin like so much old rind, to drink so that he might escape crumbling into ashes, so that he might enjoy some last felicity by finishing his life in the happy stupor of perpetual intoxication.

That night Fauchard had greatly feared that the fire would boil some more of his blood. But, already at eight o'clock he was agreeably surprised to see Natalie, his wife, arrive with the four quarts of wine which she had obtained on credit from Caffiaux, and which he had no longer expected. She expressed regret that she had not a little meat to give him also, but Dacheux, she said, had shown himself pitiless. Ever in low spirits, and greatly given to complaining, she expressed her anxiety as to how they would manage to get anything to eat on the morrow. But her husband, who was well pleased at having secured his wine, dismissed her saying that he should apply to the manager for an advance as his mates had done. A crust of bread sufficed him as food, he drank, and at once found himself full of confidence. When the time to remove the crucibles arrived he tossed off another half-quart at a gulp, and went to the water cistern to soak the large linen apron that enveloped him. Then, with big wooden shoes on his feet and wet gloves on his hands, armed too with long iron pincers, he stood astride the furnace, resting his right foot on the cover, which had just been pushed aside, his chest and stomach being exposed the while to the frightful heat which arose from the open volcano. For a moment he appeared quite red, blazing like a torch in the midst of a brazier. His wooden shoes steamed, his apron and his gloves steamed, the whole of his flesh seemed to melt away. But without evincing any haste, he looked below him. His eyes, accustomed to the brightest glare, sought the crucible in the depths of the burning pit. Then he stooped slightly in order to seize it with his long pincers, and with a sudden straightening of the loins, with three supple rhythmical movements—one of his hands opening and gliding along the rod until the other joined it—he drew up the crucible, raising easily, at arm's length, that weight of one hundred and ten pounds—pincers and crucible combined—and deposited it on the ground, where it looked like some piece of the sun, at first of dazzling whiteness, which speedily changed to pink. Then he began the operation afresh, drawing the crucibles forth one by one amidst the increasing glow, with more skill even than strength, coming and going amidst that incandescent matter without ever burning himself, without seeming even to feel the intolerable heat.

They were going to cast some little shells, of one hundred and thirty-two pounds. The bottle-shaped moulds were

ranged in two rows. And when the assistants had skimmed the slag off the crucibles with the aid of iron rods, which came away smoking and dropping purple slaver, the head caster quickly seized the crucibles with his large, round-jawed pincers, and emptied two into each mould. And the metal flowed like white lava, with just a faint pinkish tinge here and there amidst a shooting of fine blue sparks as delicate as flowers. It might have been thought that the man was decanting some bright, gold-spangled liqueur; all was done noiselessly, with precise and nimble movements, amidst a blaze and a heat that changed the whole place into a devouring brazier.

Luc, who was unaccustomed to it all, felt stifling, unable to remain there any longer. At a distance of twelve and even fifteen feet from the furnaces his face was scorched, and a burning perspiration streamed from him. The shells had interested him, and he watched them cooling, asking himself what men they would some day kill. And going on into the next hall, he there found himself among the steam hammers and the forging-press. This hall was now asleep, with all its monstrous appliances. Its press of a force of two thousand tons and its hammers of lesser power spread out, showing in the depths of the gloom their black squat silhouettes, which suggested those of barbarian gods. And here Luc found more projectiles, shells which that very day had been forged under the smallest steam-hammer, on leaving the moulds after annealing. Then he became interested in the tube of a large naval gun, more than nineteen feet long, which was still warm from having passed under the press. Billets totalling two thousand two hundred pounds of steel had spread out and adapted themselves like rolls of paste to form that tube, which was waiting chained, ready to be lifted by powerful cranes and carried to the turning-lathes, which were farther off, beyond the hall where the Martin furnace and some of the steel-casting plant were installed.

Luc went on to the end, across that hall also, the most spacious of them all, for there the largest pieces were cast. The Martin furnace enabled one to pour large quantities of steel in a state of fusion into the cast-iron moulds, whilst eight feet overhead two rolling bridges worked by electricity gently and easily moved huge pieces weighing many tons to every requisite point. Then Luc entered the lathe workshop, a huge closed shed which was rather better kept than the

others, and where on either hand he found a series of admirable appliances in which incomparable delicacy and power were blended. There were planes for naval armour-plates which finished off metal-work even as a carpenter's plane gives a finish to wood. And there were the lathes of precise if intricate mechanism, as pretty as jewels, and as amusing as toys. Only some of them worked at night-time, each lighted by a single electric lamp, and giving forth but a faint sound in the deep silence. Again did Luc come upon projectiles. There was one shell which had been fixed to a lathe, to be calibrated externally. It turned round and round with a prodigious speed, and steel shavings which suggested silver curls flew away from under the narrow motionless blade. Afterwards it would only have to be hollowed internally, tempered, and finished. But where were the men that would be killed by it, after it had been charged? As the outcome of all that heroic human labour, the subjugation of iron bringing royalty to man and victory over the forces of nature, Luc beheld a vision of massacre, all the bloodthirsty madness of a battle-field! He walked on, and at a little distance came upon a large lathe, where a cannon similar to the one whose forged tube he had just seen was revolving. This one, however, was already calibrated externally, and shone like new money. Under the supervision of a youth who leant forward, attentively watching the mechanism, like a clock-maker that of a watch, it turned and turned interminably with a gentle humming, whilst the blade inside drilled it with marvellous precision. And when that gun also should have been tempered, cast from the summit of the tower into a bath of petroleum oil, to what battle-field would it journey to kill men—how many lives would it mow down, that gun made of steel which men in a spirit of brotherliness should have fashioned only into rails and ploughshares!

Luc pushed a door open, and made his escape into the open air. The night was damply warm, and he drew a long breath, feeling refreshed by the wind which was blowing. When he raised his eyes he was unable to distinguish a single star beyond the wild rush of the clouds. But the lamp globes, shining here and there in the yard replaced the hidden moon, and again he saw the chimneys rising amidst lurid smoke, and a coal-smirched sky, across which upon every side, forming as it were some gigantic cobweb, flew all the wires which transmitted electric power. The machines which

produced it, two machines of great beauty, were working close by in some new buildings. There were also some works for making bricks and crucibles of refractory clay; there was a carpenter's shop for model-making and packing, and numerous warehouses for commercial steel and iron. And Luc, after losing himself for a time in that little town, well pleased when he came upon deserted stretches, black peaceful nooks where he seemed to revive to life, suddenly found himself once more inside the inferno. On looking around him he perceived that he was again in the gallery containing the furnaces for the crucibles.

Another operation was now being executed there. Seventy crucibles were being removed at the same moment for some big piece of casting which was to weigh over three thousand nine hundred pounds. The mould with its funnel was waiting in readiness in the pit, in the neighbouring hall. And the procession was swiftly organised, all the helpers of the various squads took part in it, two men for each crucible, which they raised with pincers and carried off with long and easy strides. Another, then another, then another, the whole seventy crucibles passed along in a dazzling procession. One might have thought it some ballet scene, in which vague dancers with light and shadowy feet passed two-by-two carrying huge Venetian lanterns, orange-red in hue. And the marvellous part of it all was the extraordinary rapidity, the perfect assurance of the well-regulated movements in which the bearers were seen gambolling, as it were, in the midst of fire, hastening up, elbowing one another, marching off and coming back, juggling all the while with fusing stars. In less than three minutes the seventy crucibles were emptied into the mould, whence arose a sheaf of gold, a great spreading bouquet of sparks.

When Luc at last returned to the hall containing the puddling furnaces and the rollers, after a good half-hour's promenade, he found Bonnaire finishing his work.

'I will be with you in a moment, monsieur,' said the puddler.

On the glaring sole of the furnace, whose open door was blazing, he had already on three occasions isolated one quarter of the incandescent metal, that is a hundredweight of it, which he had rolled and fashioned into a kind of ball with the aid of his bar; and those three quarters had gone one after the other to the hammer. He was now dealing

with the fourth and last portion. For twenty minutes he had been standing before that voracious maw, his chest almost crackling from the heat of the furnace, his hands manipulating his heavy hooked bar, and his eyes clearly seeing how to do the work aright in spite of all the dazzling flames. He gazed fixedly at the fiery ball of steel which he rolled over and over continuously in the centre of the brazier; and in the fierce reverberation which gilded his tall pinkish form against the black background of darkness, he looked like some maker of planets, busily creating new worlds. But at last he finished, withdrew his flaming bar, and handed over to his mate the last hundredweight of the charge.

The stoker was in readiness with a little iron chariot. Armed with his pincers the assistant puddler seized hold of the ball, which suggested some huge fiery sponge that had sprouted on the side of a volcanic cavern, and with an effort he brought it out and threw it into the chariot, which the stoker quickly wheeled to the hammer. A smith at once caught it with his own pincers and placed and turned it over under the hammer, which all at once began working. Then came a deafening noise and a perfect dazzlement. The ground quaked, a pealing of bells seemed to ring out, whilst the smith, gloved and bound round with leather, disappeared amidst a perfect tornado of sparks. At some moments the expectorations were so large that they burst, here and there, like canister shot. Impassive amidst that fusillade, the smith turned the sponge over and over in order that it might be struck on every side and converted into a 'lump,' a loaf of steel, ready for the rollers. And the hammer obeyed him, struck here, struck there, slackening or hastening its blows without a word even coming from his lips, without anyone even detecting the signs which he made to the hammer-lad who sat aloft in his little box with his hand on the starting-lever.

Luc, who had drawn near whilst Bonnaire was changing his clothes, recognised little Fortuné, Fauchard's brother-in-law, in the hammer-lad thus perched on high, motionless for hours together, giving no other sign of life than a little mechanical gesture of the hand amidst the deafening uproar which he raised. A touch on the right-hand lever so that the hammer might fall, a touch on the left-hand lever so that it might rise, that was all; the little lad's mind was confined to that narrow space. By the bright gleams of the sparks

one could for a moment perceive him, slim and frail, with an ashen face, discoloured hair, and the blurred eyes of a poor little being whose growth, both physically and mentally, had been arrested by brutish work, in which there was nothing to attract one, in which there was never a chance of any initiative.

'If monsieur's willing, I'm ready now,' said Bonnaire, just as the hammer at last became silent.

Luc quickly turned round, and found the master puddler before him, wearing a jersey and a coarse woollen jacket, whilst under one of his arms was a bundle made up of his working-clothes and certain small articles belonging to him—all his baggage in fact, since he was leaving the works to return to them no more.

'Quite so—let us be off,' said Luc.

But Bonnaire paused for another moment. As if he fancied that he might have forgotten something he gave a last glance inside the plank hut which served as a cloakroom. Then he looked at his furnace, the furnace which he had made his own by more than ten years of hard toil, turning out there thousands of pounds of steel fit for the rollers. He was leaving the establishment of his own free will, in the idea that such was his duty towards both his mates and himself, but for that very reason the severance was the more heroic. However, he forced back the emotion which was clutching him at the throat, and passed out the first in advance of Luc.

'Take care, monsieur,' he said; 'that piece is still warm—it would burn your boot.'

Neither spoke any further. They crossed the two dim yards under the lunar lights, and passed before the low building where the tilt-hammers were beating ragefully. And as soon as they were outside the Abyss the black night seized hold of them again, and the glow and growl of the monster died away behind them. The wind was still blowing, a wind carrying the ragged flight of clouds skyward; and across the bridge the bank of the Mionne was deserted, not a soul was visible.

When Luc had found Josine reclining on the bench where he had left her, motionless and staring into the darkness, with Nanet asleep and pressing his head against her, he wished to withdraw, for he considered his mission ended, since Bonnaire would now find the poor creature some place of



shelter. But the puddler suddenly became embarrassed and anxious at the idea of the scene which would follow his home-coming when his wife, that terrible Toupe, should see him accompanying that hussy. The scene was bound to be the more frightful since he had not told his wife of his intention to quit the works. He foresaw, indeed, that a tremendous quarrel would break out when she learnt that he was without work, through throwing himself voluntarily out of employment.

'Shall I accompany you?' Luc suggested; 'I might be able to explain things.'

'Upon my word, monsieur,' replied the other, feeling relieved, 'it would perhaps be the better if you did.'

No words passed between Bonnaire and Josine. She seemed ashamed in presence of the master puddler, and if he, with his good nature, knowing too all that she suffered with Ragu, evinced a kind of fatherly pity towards her, he none the less blamed her for having yielded to that bad fellow. Josine had awakened Nanet on seeing the two men arrive, and after an encouraging sign from Luc, she and the boy followed them in silence. All four turned to the right, skirting the railway embankment, and thus entering Old Beaucclair, whose hovels spread like some horrid stagnant pool over the flat ground just at the opening of the gorge. There was an intricate maze of narrow steets and lanes lacking both air and light, and infected by filthy gutters which the more torrential rains alone cleansed. The overcrowding of the wretched populace in so small a space was hard to understand, when in front of it one perceived La Roumagne spreading its immense plain where the breath of heaven blew freely as over the sea. The bitter keenness of the battle for money and property alone accounted for the niggardly fashion in which the right of the inhabitants to some little portion of the soil, the few yards requisite for everyday life, had been granted. Speculators had taken a hand in it all, and one or two centuries of wretchedness had culminated in a cloaca of cheap lodgings, whence people were frequently expelled by their landlords, low as might be the rents demanded for certain of those dens, where well-to-do people would not have allowed even their dogs to sleep. Chance-wise over the ground had risen those little dark houses, those damp shanties of plaster-work, those vermin and fever-breeding nests; and mournful indeed at that night hour, under the lugubrious sky, appeared that accursed city of labour, so dim, so closely-

pent, filthy too, like some horrid vegetation of social injustice.

Bonnaire, walking ahead, followed a lane, then turned into another, and at last reached the Rue des Trois-Lunes, one of the narrowest of the so-called streets. It had no footways, and was paved with pointed pebbles picked from the bed of the Mionne. The black and créviced house of which he occupied the first floor had, one day suddenly 'settled,' lurching in such wise that it had been necessary to shore up the frontage with four great beams; and Ragu, as it happened, occupied the two rooms of the second story, whose sloping floor those beams supported. Down below, there was no hall; the precipitous ladder-like stairs started from the very threshold.

'And so, monsieur,' Bonnaire at last said to Luc, 'you will be kind enough to come up with me.'

He had once more become embarrassed. Josine understood that he did not dare take her to his rooms for fear of some affront, though he suffered at having to leave her still in the street with the child. In her gentle resigned way she therefore arranged matters. 'We need not go in,' she said; 'we'll wait on the stairs up above.'

Bonnaire immediately fell in with the suggestion. 'That's best,' said he. 'Have a little patience, sit down a moment, and if the key's in my place, I'll bring it to you, and then you can go to bed.'

Josine and Nanet had already disappeared into the dense darkness enveloping the stairs. One could no longer even hear them breathing, they had ensconced themselves in some nook overhead. And Bonnaire in his turn then went up, guiding Luc, warning him respecting the height of the steps, and telling him to keep hold of the greasy rope which served in lieu of a hand-rail.

'There, monsieur, that's it. Don't move,' he said at last. 'Ah! the landings aren't large, and one would turn a fine somersault if one were to fall.'

He opened a door and politely made Luc pass before him into a fairly spacious room, where a little petroleum lamp shed a yellowish light. In spite of the lateness of the hour La Toupe was still mending some house linen beside this lamp; whilst her father, Daddy Lunot, as he was called, had fallen asleep in a shadowy nook, with his pipe, which had gone out, between his gums. In a bed, standing in one corner, slept the two

children, Lucien and Antoinette, one six, the other four years old, and both of them fine, big children for their respective ages. Apart from this common room, where the family cooked and ate their meals, the lodging only comprised two others, the bed-room of the husband and wife, and that of Daddy Lunot.

La Toupe, stupefied at seeing her husband return at that hour, for she had been warned of nothing, raised her head, exclaiming: 'What, is it you?'

He did not wish to start the great quarrel by immediately telling her that he had left the Abyss. He preferred to settle the matter of Josine and Nanet first of all. So he replied evasively: 'Yes, I've finished, so I've come back.' Then, without leaving his wife time to ask any more questions, he introduced Luc, saying: 'Here, this gentleman, who is a friend of Monsieur Jordan's, came to ask me something—he'll explain it to you.'

Her surprise and suspicion increasing, La Toupe turned towards the young man, who thereby perceived her great likeness to her brother Ragu. Short and choleric, she had his strongly marked face, with thick ruddy hair, a low forehead, thin nose and massive jaws. Her bright complexion, the freshness of which still rendered her attractive and young-looking at eight-and-twenty years of age, alone explained the reason which had induced Bonnaire to marry her, though he had been well acquainted with her abominable temper. That which everybody had then foreseen had come to pass. La Toupe made the home wretched by her everlasting fits of anger. In order to secure some peace her husband had to bow to her will in every little matter of their daily life. Very coquettish, consumed by the ambition to be well-dressed and possess jewellery, she only evinced a little gentleness when she was able to deck herself in a new gown.

Luc, being thus called upon to speak, felt the necessity of gaining her good will by a compliment. From the moment of crossing the threshold, however bare might be the scanty furniture, he had remarked that the room seemed very clean, thanks undoubtedly to the housewife's carefulness. And drawing near to the bed he exclaimed: 'Ah! what fine children, they are sleeping like little angels.'

La Toupe smiled, but looked at him fixedly and waited, feeling thoroughly convinced that this gentleman would not have put himself out to call there if he had not had something of importance to obtain from her. And when he found

himself obliged to come to the point, when he related how he had found Josine starving on a bench, abandoned there in the night, she made a passionate gesture, and her jaws tightened. Without even answering the gentleman, she turned towards her husband in a fury: 'What! What's this again? Is it any concern of mine?'

Bonnaire, thus compelled to intervene, strove to pacify her in his kindly, conciliatory way.

'All the same,' said he, 'if Ragu left the key with you, one ought to give it to the poor creature, because he's over yonder at Caffiaux's place, and may well pass the night there. One can't leave a woman and a child to sleep out of doors.'

At this La Toupe exploded: 'Yes, I've got the key!' said she. 'Yes, Ragu gave it to me, and precisely because he wanted to prevent that hussy from installing herself any more in his rooms, with her little scamp of a brother! But I don't want to know anything about those horrors! I only know one thing, it was Ragu who confided the key to me, and it's to Ragu that I shall return it.'

Then, as her husband again attempted to move her to pity, she violently silenced him. 'Do you want to make me take up with my brother's fancies then?' she cried. 'Just let the girl go and kick the bucket elsewhere, since she chose to listen to him. A nice state of things it's been, and no mistake! No, no, each for himself or herself; and as for her, let her remain in the gutter; a little sooner, a little later, it all amounts to the same thing!'

Luc listened, feeling hurt and indignant. In her he found all the harshness of the virtuous women of her class, who show themselves pitiless towards the girls that stumble amidst their trying struggle for life. And in La Toupe's case, ever since the day when she had learnt that her brother had bought Josine a little silver ring, there had been covert jealousy and hatred of that pretty girl whom she pictured fascinating men and wheedling gold chains and silk gowns out of them.

'One ought to be kind-hearted, madame,' was all that Luc could say, in a voice that quivered with compassion.

But La Toupe did not have time to answer, for all at once an uproar of heavy stumbling footsteps resounded on the stairs, and hands fumbled at the knob of the door, which opened. It was Ragu with Bourron, one following the other like a pair of good-humoured drunkards who, having wetted

their whistles in company, could no longer separate. Nevertheless Ragu, who had some sense left him, had torn himself away from Caffiaux's wine-shop, saying that, however pleasant it might be there, he none the less had to go back to work on the morrow. And thus he had looked in at his sister's with his mate, in order to get his key.

'Your key!' cried La Toupe sharply, 'there it is! And I won't keep it again, mind. I've just had a lot of foolish things said to me in order to make me give it to that gad-about. Another time when you want to turn somebody out of the house just do it yourself.'

Ragu, whose heart had doubtless been softened by liquor, began to laugh: 'She's so stupid, is Josine,' he said. 'If she had wanted to be pleasant she would have drunk a glass with us instead of snivelling. But women never know how to tackle men.'

He was unable to express himself more fully, for just then Bourron, who had fallen on a chair, laughing at nothing with his everlasting good humour, inquired of Bonnaire: 'I say, is it true then that you're leaving the works?'

La Toupe turned round, starting as if a pistol had been fired off behind her. 'What! He's leaving the works!' she cried.

Silence fell. Then Bonnaire courageously came to a decision. 'Yes, I'm leaving the works; I can't do otherwise.'

'You're leaving the works! you're leaving the works!' bawled his wife, quite furious and distracted as she took her stand before him. 'So that two months' strike, which made us spend all our savings, wasn't enough, eh? It's for you to pay the piper now, eh? So we shall die of starvation, and I shall have to go about naked!'

He did not lose his temper, but gently answered: 'It's quite possible that you won't have a new gown for New Year's Day, and perhaps too we shall have to go on short commons. But I repeat to you that I'm doing what I ought to do!'

She did not give up the battle as yet, but drew still nearer, shouting in his face: 'Oh, bunkum! you needn't imagine that folks will be grateful to you! Your mates don't scruple to say that if it hadn't been for that strike of yours they'd never have starved during those two months. Do you know what they'll say when they hear that you've left the works?'

They'll say that it serves you right, and that you're only an idiot! I'll never allow you to do such a foolish thing! You hear, you'll go back to-morrow!

Bonnaire looked at her fixedly with his bright and steady eyes. If as a rule he gave way on points of domestic policy, if he allowed her to reign despotically in ordinary household matters, he became like iron whenever any case of conscience arose. And so, without raising his voice, in a firm tone which she well knew, he answered: 'You will please keep quiet. Those are matters for us men; women like you don't understand anything about them, and so it's better that they shouldn't meddle with them. You're very nice, but the best thing you can do is to go on mending your linen again if you don't want a quarrel.'

He thereupon pushed her towards the chair near the lamp, and forced her to sit down again. Conquered, trembling with wrath which she knew would henceforth be futile, she took up her needle, and made a pretence of feeling no further interest in the questions from which she had been so decisively thrust aside. Awakened by the noise of voices, Daddy Lunot her father, without evincing any astonishment at the sight of so many people, lighted his pipe once more and listened to the talk with the air of an old philosopher who had lost every illusion; whilst in their little bed the children Lucien and Antoinette, likewise roused from their slumber, opened their eyes widely, and seemed to be striving to understand the serious things which the big folk were saying.

Bonnaire was now addressing himself to Luc, as if to invoke his testimony.

'Each has his honour, is that not so, monsieur? The strike was inevitable, and if it had to be begun over again, I should begin it over again—that is, I should employ my influence in urging my mates to try to secure justice. One can't let oneself be devoured—work ought to be paid at its proper price, unless men are willing to become mere slaves. And we were so much in the right that Monsieur Delaveau had to give way on every point by accepting our new wage tariff. But I can now see that he is furious, and that somebody, as my wife puts it, has got to pay for the damage. If I were not to go off willingly to-day, he'd find a pretext for turning me out to-morrow. So what? Am I to hang on obstinately and become a pretext for everlasting disputes?

No, no! It would all fall on my mates, it would bring them all sorts of worries, and it would be very wrong of me. I pretended to go back, because my mates talked of continuing the strike if I didn't. But now that they are all back at work and quite quiet I prefer to take myself off. That will settle everything; none of them will stir, and I shall have done what I ought to do. That's my view of honour, monsieur—each has his own.'

He said all this with simple grandeur, with so easy and courageous an air that Luc felt deeply touched. From that man whom he had seen black and taciturn, toiling so painfully before his furnace, from that man whom he had seen gentle and kindly, tolerant and conciliatory in household matters, there now arose one of the heroes of labour, one of those obscure strugglers who have given their whole being to the cause of justice, and who carry their brotherliness to the point of immolating themselves in silence for the sake of others.

Without ceasing to draw her needle La Toupe meanwhile repeated violently: 'And we shall starve.'

'And we shall starve, it's quite possible,' said Bonnaire, 'but I shall be able to sleep in peace.'

Ragu began to sneer. 'Oh! starve, that's useless, that's never done any good. Not that I defend the masters—a pretty gang they are, all of them! Only as we need them we always have come to an understanding with them, and do pretty well as they want.'

He rattled on, jesting, and revealing his true nature. He was the average workman, neither good nor bad, the spoilt product of the present-day wage system. He cried out at times against capitalist rule, he was enraged by the strain of the labour imposed on him, and was even capable of a short rebellion. But prolonged atavism had bent him; he really had the soul of a slave, respecting established traditions and envying the employer—that sovereign master who possessed and enjoyed everything; and the only covert ambition that he nourished was that of taking the employer's place some fine morning in order to possess and enjoy life in his turn. Briefly his ideal was to do nothing, to be the master so that he might have nothing to do.

'Ah! that pig Delaveau!' he said, 'I should like to be just a week in his skin and to see him in mine. It would amuse me to see him smoking one of those big cigars of his

while making a ball. But everything happens, you know, and we may all become masters in the next shake-up !'

This idea amused Bourron vastly ; he gaped with admiration before Ragu whenever they had drunk together. ' That's true, ah ! dash it, what a spree it will be when we become the masters !'

But Bonnaire shrugged his shoulders, full of contempt for that base conception of the future victory of the toilers over their exploiters. He had read, reflected, and he thought he knew. Excited by all that had just been said, wishing to show that he was right, he again spoke. In his words Luc recognised the Collectivist idea such as it is formulated by the irreconcilable ones of the party. First of all the nation had to resume possession of the soil and all instruments of labour in order to socialise and restore them to one and all. Then labour would be reorganised, rendered general and compulsory, in such wise that remuneration would be proportionate to the hours of toil which each man supplied. The matter on which Bonnaire grew muddled was the practical method to employ in order to establish this socialisation, and particularly the working of it when it should be put into practice ; for such intricate machinery would need direction and control, a harsh and vexatious State police system. And when Luc, who did not yet go so far as Bonnaire did in his humanitarian cravings, offered some objections, the other replied with the quiet faith of a believer : ' Everything belongs to us ; we shall take everything back, so that each may have his just share of work and rest, trouble and joy. There is no other reasonable solution, the injustice and the sufferings of the world have become too great.'

Even Ragu and Bourron agreed with this. Had not the wage-system corrupted and poisoned everything ! It was that which disseminated anger and hatred, gave rise to class warfare, the long war of extermination which capital and labour were waging. It was by the wage-system that man had become wolfish towards man amidst the conflict of egotism, the monstrous tyranny of a social system based on iniquity. Misery had no other cause. The wage-system was the evil ferment which engendered hunger with all its disastrous consequences, theft, murder, prostitution, the downfall and rebellion of men and women cast beyond the pale of love, thrown like perverse, destructive forces athwart society. And there was only one remedy, the abolition of the wage-



system, which must be replaced by the other, the new, dreamt-of system, whose secret to-morrow would disclose. From that point began the battle of the systems, each man thinking that in his own system rested the happiness of the coming centuries; and a bitter political *mêlée* resulted from the clashing of the Socialist parties, each of which sought to impose on the others its own plans for the reorganisation of labour and the equitable distribution of wealth. But none the less the wage-system in its present form was condemned by one and all, and nothing could save it; it had served its time, and it would disappear even as slavery, once so universal, had disappeared when one of the periods of mankind's history had ended by reason of the ever-constant onward march. That wage-system even now was but a dead organ which threatened to poison the whole body, and which the life of nations must necessarily eliminate under penalty of coming to a tragic end.

'For instance,' Bonnaire continued, 'those Qurignons who founded the Abyss were not bad-hearted people. The last one, Michel, who came to so sad an end, tried to ameliorate the workman's lot. It is to him one owes the creation of a pension fund, for which he gave the first hundred thousand francs, engaging also to double every year such sums as were paid in by the subscribers. He also established a free library, a reading-room, a dispensary where one can see the doctor gratis twice a week, a workshop, too, and a school for the children. And though Monsieur Delaveau isn't at all so well disposed towards the men, he has naturally been obliged to respect all that. It has been working for years now, but when all is said it's of no good at all. It's mere charity; it isn't justice! It may go on working for years and years without starvation and misery being any the less. No, no, the people who talk of "relieving" distress are simply good-natured fools; there's no relief possible, the evil has to be cut off at the root.'

At this moment old Lunot, whom the others thought asleep again, spoke from out of the shadows: 'I knew the Qurignons,' said he.

Luc turned and perceived him on his chair, vainly pulling at his extinguished pipe. He was fifty years old, and had remained nearly thirty years a drawer at the Abyss. Short and stout as he was, with a pale, puffy face, one might have thought that the furnaces had swollen instead of withering him. Perhaps it was the water with which he had

been obliged to drench himself in the performance of his work that had first given him the rheumatics. At all events he had been attacked in the legs at an early age, and now he could only walk with great difficulty. And as he had not fulfilled the necessary conditions to obtain even the ridiculous pension of three hundred francs a year<sup>1</sup> to which the new workmen would be entitled later on, he would have perished of starvation in the streets, like some old stricken beast of burden, if his daughter, La Toupe, on the advice of Bonnaire, had not taken him in, making him pay for her generosity in this respect by subjecting him to continual reproaches and all sorts of privations.

'Ah, yes,' he slowly repeated, 'I knew the Qurignons. There was Monsieur Michel, who's now dead and who was five years older than me. And there's still Monsieur Jérôme, under whom I first went to the works when I was eighteen years old. He was already forty-five at that time, but that doesn't prevent him from still being alive. But before Monsieur Jérôme, there was Monsieur Blaise, the founder, who first installed himself at the Abyss with his tilt-hammers nigh on eighty years ago. I didn't know him myself. But my father Jean Ragu, and my grandfather, Pierre Ragu, worked with him; and one may even say that Pierre Ragu was his mate, since they were both mere workmen with hardly a copper in their pockets when they started on the job together, in the gorge of the Bleuse Mountains, then deserted, near the bank of the Mionne, where there was a waterfall. The Qurignons made a big fortune, whereas here am I, Jacques Ragu, with my bad legs and never a copper, and here's my son, Auguste, who'll never be any richer than I am after thirty years' hard work, to say nothing of my daughter and her children, who are all threatened with starvation, just as the Ragus have always been for a hundred years or more.'

It was not angrily that he said these things, but rather with the resignation of an old stricken animal. For a moment he looked at his pipe, surprised at seeing no smoke ascend from it. Then, remarking that Luc was listening to him with compassionate interest, he concluded with a slight shrug of the shoulders: 'Bah! monsieur, that's the fate of all of us poor devils! There will always be masters and workmen.

My grandfather and father were just as I am, and my son will be the same too. What's the use of rebelling? Each of us draws his lot when he's born. All the same, one thing that's desirable when a man gets old is that he should at least have the means to buy himself sufficient tobacco.'

'Tobacco!' cried La Toupe, 'why you've smoked two sous' worth to-day! Do you imagine that I'm going to keep you in tobacco, now that we sha'n't even be able to buy bread?'

To her father's great despair she rationed him with respect to tobacco. It was in vain that he tried to get his pipe alight again; decidedly only ashes were left in it. And Luc, with increasing compassion in his heart, continued looking at him as he sat there, huddled up on his chair. The wage-system ended in that lamentable wreck of a man, the worker done for at fifty years of age, the drawer condemned to be always a drawer, deformed, hebetated, reduced to imbecility and paralysis by his mechanical toil. In that poor being there survived nothing save the fatalist sentiment of slavery.

But Bonnaire protested superbly: 'No, no! It won't always be like that, there won't always be masters and toilers; the day will come when one and all will be free and joyful men! Our sons will perhaps see that day, and it is really worth while that we the fathers should suffer a little more if thereby we are to procure happiness for them to-morrow.'

'Dash it!' exclaimed Ragu, in a merry way. 'Hurry up, I should like to see that. It would just suit me to have nothing more to do, and to eat chicken at every meal!'

'And me too, and me too!' seconded Bourron in ecstasy. 'Keep me a place!'

With a gesture expressive of utter disillusion, old Lunot silenced them in order to resume: 'Let all that be, those are the things one hopes for when one's young! A man's head is full of folly then, and he imagines that he's going to change the world. But then the world goes on, and he's swept away with the others. I bear no grudge against anybody, I don't. At times, when I can drag myself about a bit, I meet Monsieur Jérôme in his little conveyance, which a servant pushes along. And I take off my cap to him, because it's only fit that one should do so to a man who gave one work to do,

and who's so rich. I fancy, though, that he doesn't know me, for he contents himself with looking at me with those eyes of his, which seem to be full of clear water. But when all's said the Qurignons drew the big prize, so they are entitled to be respected.'

Ragu thereupon related that Bourron and he, on leaving the works that very evening, had seen Monsieur Jérôme pass in his little conveyance. They had taken off their caps to him, and that was only natural. How could they do otherwise without being impolite? All the same, that a Ragu should be on foot in the mud, with his stomach empty, bowing to a well-dressed Qurignon with a rug over him and a servant wheeling him about like a baby who'd grown too fat, why that was enough to put one in a rage. In fact it gave one the idea of throwing one's tools into the water and compelling the rich to shell out, in order that one might take one's turn in doing nothing.

'Doing nothing, no, no! That would be death,' resumed Bonnaire. 'Everybody ought to work, in that way happiness would be won, and unjust misery would at last be vanquished. One must not envy those Qurignons. When they are quoted as examples, when people say to us: "You see very well that with intelligence, toil, and economy, a workman may acquire a large fortune," I feel a little irritated, because I understand very well that all that money can only have been gained by exploiting our mates, by docking their food and their liberty; and a horrid thing like that is always paid for some day! The excessive prosperity of any one individual will never be in keeping with general happiness. No doubt we have to wait if we want to know what the future has in reserve for each of us. But I've told you what my idea is—that those youngsters of mine in the bed yonder, who are listening to us, may some day be happier than I shall ever be, and that later on their children may in turn be happier than they. To bring that about we only have to resolve on justice, to come to an understanding like brothers, and secure it, even at the price of a good deal more wretchedness.'

As Bonnaire said, Lucien and Antoinette had not gone to sleep again. Interested apparently by all those people who were talking so late, they lay, plump and rosy, with their heads motionless on the bolster, a thoughtful expression appearing in their large eyes, as if indeed they could understand the conversation.

'Some day happier than us!' said La Toupe viciously. 'Yes, of course, that is if they don't perish of want to-morrow, since you'll have no more bread to give them.'

Those words fell on Bonnaire like a hatchet-stroke. He staggered, quailing amidst his dream beneath the sudden icy chill of the misery which he seemed to have sought by quitting the works. And Luc felt the quiver of that misery pass through that large bare room where the little petroleum lamp was smoking dismally. Was not the struggle an impossible one? Would they not all—grandfather, father, mother, and children—be condemned to an early death if the wage-earner should persist in his impotent protest against capital? Heavy silence came, a big black shadow seemed to fall chilling the room, and for a moment darkening every face.

But a knock was heard, followed by laughter, and in came Babette, Bourron's wife, with her dollish face which ever wore a merry look. Plump and fresh, with a white skin and heavy tresses of a wheaten hue, she seemed like eternal spring. Failing to find her husband at Caffiaux's wine-shop, she had come to seek him at Bonnaire's, well knowing that he had some trouble in getting home when she did not lead him thither herself. Moreover, she showed no desire to scold; on the contrary she seemed amused, as if she thought it only right that her husband should have taken a little enjoyment.

'Ah! here you are, father Joy!' she gaily cried when she perceived him. 'I suspected that you were still with Ragu, and that I should find you here. It's late, you know, old man. I've put Marthe and Sébastien to bed, and now I've got to put you to bed too!'

Even as she never got angry with him, so Bourron never got angry with her, for she showed so much good grace in carrying him off from his mates.

'Ah! that's a good 'un!' he cried. 'Did you hear it? My wife puts me to bed! Well, well, I'm agreeable since it always has to end like that!'

He rose, and Babette, realising by the gloominess of everybody's face, that she had stumbled upon some serious worry, perhaps even a quarrel, endeavoured to arrange matters. She, in her own household, sang from morning till night, showing much affection for her husband, consoling him and telling him triumphant stories of future prosperity whenever he felt discouraged. The hateful want in which she had

been living ever since childhood had made no impression upon her good spirits. She was quite convinced that things would turn out all right, and for ever seemed to be on the road to Paradise.

'What is the matter with you all?' she asked. 'Are the children ill?'

Then, as La Toupe once more exploded, relating that Bonnaire was leaving the works, that they would all be dead of starvation before a week was over, and that all Beauclair, indeed, would follow suit, for people were far too wretched and it was no longer possible to live, Babette burst forth into protests, predicting no end of prosperous days of sunshine, in her gay and confident manner.

'No, no, indeed!' she cried. 'Don't upset yourself like that, my dear. Everything will settle down, you'll see. Everybody will work and everybody will be happy.'

Then she led her husband away, diverting him as she did so, saying such comical and affectionate things that he, likewise jesting, followed her with docility, his inebriety being subjugated and rendered inoffensive.

Luc was making up his mind to follow them when La Toupe, in putting her work together on the table, there perceived the key which she had thrown down for her brother to pick up.

'Well, are you going to take it?' she exclaimed. 'Are you going to bed or not? You've been told that your hussy's waiting for you somewhere. Oh! you're free to take her back again if you choose, you know!'

For a moment Ragu, in a sneering way, let the key swing from one of his thumbs. Throughout the evening he had been shouting in Bourron's face that he did not mean to feed a lazybones who had stupidly lost a finger in a boot-stitching machine, and had not known how to get sufficient compensation for it. Since his return, however, he had become more sober, and no longer felt so maliciously obstinate. Besides, his sister exasperated him with her perpetual attempts to dictate a proper line of conduct to him.

'Of course I can take her back if I choose,' he said. 'After all she's as good as many another. One might kill her and she wouldn't say a bad word to one.' Then turning to Bonnaire, who had remained silent: 'She's stupid, is Josine,' he said, 'to be always getting frightened like that. Where has she got to now?'

'She's waiting on the stairs with Nanet,' said the master puddler.

*Ragu thereupon threw the door wide open to shout: 'Josine! Josine!'*

Nobody replied, however, not the faintest sound came from the dense darkness enveloping the stairs. In the faint gleam of light which the lamp cast in the direction of the landing one could see merely Nanet, who stood there, seemingly watching and waiting.

'Ah! there you are, you little rascal!' cried Ragu. 'What on earth are you doing there?'

The child was in no wise disconcerted, he did not so much as flinch. Drawing up his little figure, no taller than a jackboot, he bravely answered: 'I was listening so as to know.'

'And your sister, where's she? Why doesn't she answer when she's called?'

'*Ma grande?* She was upstairs with me, sitting on the stairs. But when she heard you come in here, she was afraid that you might go up to beat her. So she thought it best to go down again, so that she could run away if you were bad-tempered.'

This made Ragu laugh. Besides the lad's pluck amused him. 'And you, aren't you frightened?' he asked.

'I? If you touch me, I'll shriek so loud that my sister will be warned and able to run away.'

Quite softened, the man went to lean over the stairs, and call again: 'Josine! Josine! Here, come up, don't be stupid. You know very well that I sha'n't kill you.'

But the same death-like silence continued, nothing stirred, nothing ascended from the darkness. And Luc, whose presence was no longer requisite, took leave, bowing to La Toupe, who with her lips compressed stiffly bent her head. The children had gone off to sleep again. Old Lunot, still with his extinguished pipe in his mouth, had managed to reach the little chamber where he slept, hugging the walls on his way. And Bonnaire, who in his turn had sunk upon a chair, silent amidst his cheerless surroundings, his eyes gazing far away into the threatening future, was waiting for an opportunity to follow his terrible wife to bed.

'Keep up your courage, *au revoir*,' said Luc to him, whilst vigorously shaking his hand.

On the landing Ragu was still calling, in tones which

now became entreating: 'Josine! come, Josine! I tell you that I'm no longer angry.'

And as no sign of life came from the darkness he turned towards Nanet, who meddled with nothing, preferring that his sister should act as she pleased: 'Perhaps she's run off,' said the man.

'Oh! no, where would you have her go? She must have sat down on the stairs again.'

Luc was now descending, clinging the while to the greasy rope and feeling the high and precipitous stairs with his feet for fearlest he should fall, so dense was the darkness. It seemed to him as if he were descending into a black abyss by means of a fragile ladder placed between two damp walls. And as he went lower and lower he fancied that he could hear some stifled sobs rising from the dolorous depths of the gloom.

Overhead Ragu resumed resolutely: 'Josine! Josine! Why don't you come—do you want me to go and fetch you?'

Then Luc paused, for he detected a faint breath approaching, something warm and gentle, a light, living quiver, scarcely perceptible, which became more and more tremulous as it drew nearer. And he stepped back close to the wall, for he well understood that a human creature was about to pass him, invisibly, recognisable only by the discreet touch of her figure, as she went upward.

'It is I, Josine,' he whispered, in order that she might not be frightened.

The little breath was still ascending, and no reply came. But that creature, all distress and misery, passed, brushing lightly, almost imperceptibly against him. And a feverish little hand caught hold of his own, a burning mouth was pressed to that hand of his, and kissed it ardently, in an impulse of infinite gratitude instinct with the gift of a soul. She thanked him, she gave herself, like one unknown, veiled from sight, full of the sweetest girlishness. Not a word was exchanged; there was only that silent kiss, moistened by warm tears, in the dense gloom.

The little breath had already passed, the light form was still ascending. And Luc remained overcome, affected to the depths of his being by that faint touch. The kiss of those invisible lips had gone to his heart. A sweet and powerful charm had flowed into his veins. He tried to think that he simply felt well pleased at having at last helped Josine to secure a resting-place that night. But why had



she been weeping, seated on the step of the stairs on the very threshold of the house? And why had she so long delayed returning an answer to the man overhead, who offered her a lodging once more? Was it that she had experienced mortal grief and regret, that she had sobbed at the thought of some unrealisable dream, and that in going up at last she had simply yielded to the necessity of resuming the life which fate condemned her to lead?

For the last time Ragu's voice was heard up above. 'Ah! there you are—it's none too soon. Come, you big stupid, let's go up. We sha'n't kill one another to-night, at any rate.'

Then Luc fled, feeling such despair that he instinctively sought the why and wherefore of that frightful bitterness. Whilst he found his way with difficulty through the dim maze of the filthy lanes of Old Beauclair he pondered over things and gave rein to his compassion. Poor girl! She was the victim of her surroundings, never would she have led such a life had it not been for the crushing weight and perverting influence of misery and want. And, picturing mankind as plough land, Luc thought how thoroughly it would have to be turned over in order that work might become honour and delight, in order that strong and healthy love might sprout and flower amidst a great harvest of truth and justice! Meantime, it was evidently best that the poor girl should remain with that man Ragu, provided that he did not ill-treat her too much. Then Luc glanced upward at the sky. The tempest blast had ceased blowing, and stars were appearing between the heavy and motionless clouds. But how dark was the night, how great the melancholy in which his heart was steeped!

All at once he came out on the bank of the Mionne near the wooden bridge. In front of him was the Abyss ever at work, sending forth a dull rumble amidst the clear dancing notes of its tilt-hammers which the deeper thuds of the helve-hammers punctuated. Now and again a fiery glow transpierced the gloom, and huge livid clouds of smoke passing athwart the rays of the electric lamps showed like a stormy horizon about the works. And the nocturnal life of that monster whose furnaces were never extinguished brought back to Luc a vision of murderous labour, imposed on men as in a convict prison, and remunerated, for the most part, with mistrust and contempt. Then Bonnaire's handsome face

passed before the young fellow's eyes; he perceived him as he had left him, in the dim room yonder, overcome like a vanquished man in presence of the uncertain future. And without transition there came another memory of his evening, the vague profile of Lange the potter, pouring forth his curse with all the vehemence of a prophet, predicting the destruction of Beauclair beneath the sum of its crimes. But at that hour the terrorised town had fallen asleep, and all one could see of it on the fringe of the plain was a confused dense mass where not a light gleamed. Nothing indeed seemed to exist save the Abyss, whose hellish life knew no respite; there a noise as of thunder continually rolled by, and flames incessantly devoured the lives of men.

Suddenly a clock struck midnight in the distance. And Luc then crossed the bridge and again went down the Brias road on his way back to La Crêcherie, where his bed awaited him. As he was reaching it a mighty glow suddenly illumined the whole district, the two promontories of the Bleuse Mountains, the slumbering roofs of the town, and even the far-away fields of La Roumagne. That glow came from the blast furnace whose black silhouette appeared half way up the height as in the midst of a conflagration. And as Luc raised his eyes it once more seemed to him as if he beheld some red dawn, the sunrise promised to his dream of the renovation of humanity.

## III

On the morrow, Sunday, just as Luc had risen, he received a friendly note from Madame Boisgelin, inviting him to lunch at La Guerdache. Having learnt that he was at Beauclair, and that the Jordans would only return home on the Monday, she told him how happy she would be to see him again, in order that they might chat together about their old friendship in Paris, where they had secretly conducted some big charitable enterprises together in the needy district of the Faubourg St. Antoine. And Luc, who regarded Madame Boisgelin with a kind of affectionate reverence, at once accepted her invitation, writing word that he would be at La Guerdache by eleven o'clock.

Superb weather had suddenly followed the week of heavy rain by which Beauclair had almost been submerged. The

sun had risen radiantly in the sky, which was now of a pure blue, as if it had been cleansed by all the showers. And the bright sun of September still diffused so much warmth that the roads were already dry. Luc was, therefore, well pleased to walk the couple of thousand yards which separated La Guerdache from the town. When, about a quarter past ten, he passed through the latter—that is, the new town, which stretched from the Place de la Mairie to the fields fringing La Roumagne—he was surprised by its brightness, cheerfulness, and trimness, and sorrowfully recalled the dismal aspect of the poverty-stricken quarter which he had seen the previous night. In the new town were assembled the sub-prefecture, the law court, and the prison, the last being a handsome new building, whose plaster-work was scarcely dry. As for the church of St. Vincent, an elegant sixteenth-century church astride the old and the new towns, it had lately been repaired, for its steeple had shown an inclination to topple down upon the faithful. And as Luc went on he noticed that the sunlight gilded the smart houses of the *bourgeois*, and brightened even the Place de la Mairie, which spread out beyond the populous Rue de Brias, displaying a huge and ancient building which served as both a town hall and a school.

Luc, however, speedily reached the fields by way of the Rue de Formerie, which stretched straight away beyond the square like a continuation of the Rue de Brias. La Guerdache was on the Formerie road, just outside Beauclair. Thus Luc had no occasion to hurry; and indeed he strolled along like one in a dreamy mood. At times he even turned round, and then, northward, beyond the town, whose houses descended a slight slope, he perceived the huge bar of the Bleuse Mountains parted by the precipitously enclosed gorge through which the Mionne torrent flowed. In that kind of estuary opening into the plain one could distinctly perceive the close-set buildings and lofty chimneys of the Abyss as well as the blast-furnace of La Crêcherie—in fact, quite an industrial city, which was visible from every side of La Roumagne, leagues and leagues away. Luc remained gazing at the scene for some little time, and when he slowly resumed his walk towards La Guerdache, which he could already discern beyond some clusters of magnificent trees, he recalled the typical history of the Qurignons, which his friend Jordan had once told him.

It was in 1828 that Blaise Qurignon, the workman by

whom the Abyss had been founded, had installed himself there, on the bank of the torrent, with his two tilt-hammers. He had never employed more than a score of hands, and making but a small fortune, had contented himself with building near the works a little brick pavilion in which Delaveau, the present manager, now resided. It was Jérôme Qurignon, the second of the line, born in the year when his father founded the Abyss, who became a real king of industry. In him met all the creative power derived from a long ancestry of workmen, all the incipient efforts, the century-old growth and rise of 'the people.' Hundreds of years of latent energy, a long line of ancestors obstinately seeking happiness, wrathfully battling in the gloom, working themselves at times to death, now at last yielded fruit, culminated in the advent of this victor who could toil eighteen hours a day, and whose intelligence, good sense, and will swept all obstacles aside. In less than twenty years he caused a town to spring from the ground, gave employment to twelve hundred workpeople, and gained millions of francs. And at last, stifling in the humble little house erected by his father, he expended eight hundred thousand francs<sup>1</sup> on the purchase of La Guerdache, a large and sumptuous residence in which ten families might have found accommodation, whilst around it stretched a park and a farm, the whole forming in fact a large estate. Jérôme was convinced that La Guerdache would become as it were the patriarchal home of his descendants, all the bright and loving couples who would assuredly spring from his wealth as from some blessed soil. For them he prepared a future of domination based on his dream of subjugating labour and utilising it for the enjoyment of an *élite*; for was not all the power that he felt within him definitive and infinite, and would it not even increase among his children, free from all danger of diminution and exhaustion during long, long years? But all at once a first misfortune fell upon this man, who seemed to be as vigorous as an oak-tree. Whilst he was still young—in his very prime, indeed, only two and fifty years of age—paralysis deprived him of the use of both his legs, and he had to surrender the management of the Abyss to Michel, his eldest son.

Michel Qurignon, the third of the line, was then just thirty. He had, a younger brother, Philippe, who, much against his father's wishes, had married in Paris a wonderfully beautiful but very flighty woman. And between the

<sup>1</sup> \$82,000.

two boys there was a girl, Laure, already five-and-twenty years old, who greatly distressed her parents by the extreme religiosity into which she had fallen.

Michel for his part had, when very young, married an extremely gentle, loving, but delicate woman, by whom he had two children, Gustave and Suzanne, the former being five and the latter three years old when their father was suddenly obliged to assume the management of the Abyss. It was understood that he should do so in the name and for the benefit of the whole family, each member of which was to draw a share of the profits, according to an agreement which had been arrived at. Although Michel did not in the same high degree possess his father's admirable qualities, his power of work, his quick intelligence, and his methodical habits, he none the less at first proved an excellent manager, and for ten years succeeded in preventing any decline in the business, which, indeed, he at one moment increased by replacing the old plant by new appliances. But sorrows and family losses fell upon him like premonitory signs of a coming disaster. His mother died, his father was not only paralysed and wheeled about by a servant, but sank into absolute dumbness after experiencing a difficulty in uttering certain words. Then Michel's sister, Laure, her brain quite turned by mystical notions, took the veil, in spite of all the efforts made to detain her at La Guerdache amidst the joys of the world. And from Paris, too, Michel received deplorable tidings of the affairs of his brother Philippe, whose wife was taking to scandalous adventures, dragging him, moreover, into a wild life of gambling, extravagance, and folly. Finally Michel lost his own delicate and gentle wife, which proved, indeed, his supreme loss, for it threw him off his balance and cast him into a life of disorder. He had already yielded to his passions, but in a discreet way, for fear of saddening his wife, who was always ill. But when death had carried her away, nothing was left to restrain him, and he took freely to a life of pleasure, which consumed the best part of his time and his energies.

Then came another period of ten years during which the Abyss declined, since it was no longer directed by the victorious chief of the days of conquest, but by a tired and satiated master who squandered all the booty it yielded. A feverish passion for luxury now possessed Michel, his existence became all festivity and pleasure, the spending of money for the merely material joys of life. And the worst was that in

addition to this cause of ruin, in addition, moreover to bad management and ever-increasing loss of energy, there came a commercial crisis, in which the whole metallurgic industry of the region nearly perished. It became impossible to manufacture steel rails and girders cheaply enough in face of the victorious competition of the works of Northern and Eastern France, which, thanks to a newly discovered chemical process, were now able to employ defective ore which formerly it had been impossible to utilise. Thus, after a struggle of two years' duration, Michel felt the Abyss crumbling to pieces beneath him, and one day, when he was already unhinged by having to borrow three hundred thousand francs to meet some heavy bills then reaching maturity, a horrible drama drove him to desperation.

He was then nearly fifty-four years old, and was madly in love with a pretty girl whom he had brought from Paris and concealed in Beauchair. At times he indulged in the wild dream of fleeing with her to some land of the sun, far away from all financial worries. His son Gustave, who after failing in his studies led an idle life at seven-and-twenty years of age, resided with him on a footing of friendly equality, well acquainted with the intrigue, about which indeed he often jested. He made fun also of the Abyss, refusing to set foot amongst all that grimy, evil-smelling old iron, for he greatly preferred to ride, hunt, and shoot, and generally lead the empty life of an amiable *fin-de-race* young man, as if he could count several centuries of illustrious ancestry. And thus it happened that one fine evening, after 'lifting' out of a *secrétaire* the single hundred thousand francs which his father had as yet managed to get together for his payments, Master Gustave carried off the pretty girl, who had flung her arms around his neck at the sight of so much money. And on the morrow Michel, struck both in heart and brain by this collapse of his passion and his fortune, yielded to the vertigo of horror and shot himself dead with a revolver.

Three years had already elapsed since that suicide. And the speedy downfall of one Qurignon had been followed by that of another and another, as if by way of example to show how great might prove the severity of destiny. Shortly after Gustave's departure it was learnt that he had been killed in a carriage accident at Nice, a pair of runaway horses having carried him over a precipice. Then Michel's younger brother Philippe likewise disappeared from the scene, being killed in

a duel, the outcome of a dirty affair into which he had been drawn by his terrible wife, who was said to be now in Russia with a tenor, whilst the only child born to them, André Qurignon, the last of the line, had been sent perforce to a private asylum, since he suffered from an affection of the spine complicated by mental disorder. Apart from that sufferer and Laure, who still led a cloistral life, so that she also seemed to be dead, there remained of all the Qurignons only old Jérôme and Michel's daughter, Suzanne.

She, when twenty years of age—that is, five years before her father's death—had married Boisgelin, who had met her whilst visiting at a country house. Although the Abyss was then already in peril, Michel in his ostentatious way had made arrangements which enabled him to give his daughter a dowry of a million francs. Boisgelin on his side was very wealthy, having inherited from his grandfather and father a fortune of more than six millions, amassed in all sorts of suspicious affairs, redolent of usury and theft—by which he, however, was not personally besmirched, since he had lived in perfect idleness ever since his entry into the world. He was held in great esteem and envy, and people were always eager to bow to him, for he resided in a superb mansion near the Parc Monceau in Paris, and led a life of wild display and extravagance. After seeking distinction by remaining invariably the last of his class at the Lycée Condorcet,<sup>1</sup> which he had astonished by his elegance, he had never done anything, but imagined himself to be a modern-style aristocrat, one who established his claim to nobility by the magnificence he showed in spending the fortune acquired by his forerunners without even lowering himself to earn a copper. The misfortune was that Boisgelin's six millions no longer sufficed at last to keep his establishment on the high footing which it had reached, and that he allowed himself to be drawn into financial speculations of which he understood nothing. The Bourse was just then going mad over some new gold mines, and he was told that by venturing his fortune he might treble it in two years' time.

<sup>1</sup> The Lycée Condorcet (formerly Bonaparte) has always been both the most elegant and the most literary of all the Paris State colleges. Th. de Banville, Dumas fils, the brothers de Goncourt, the younger Guizots, Eugène Sue, Taine, Alphonse Karr, Prévost-Paradol, &c., were educated there; and among those who sat on the forms in my time there—during the Second Empire—were many who have since become distinguished French journalists, authors, and statesmen.—*Trans.*

All at once, however, came disaster and downfall, and for a moment he almost thought that he was absolutely ruined, to such a point indeed as to retain not even a crust of bread for the morrow. He wept like a child at the thought, and looked at his hands, which had ever idled, wondering what he would now be able to do, since he knew not how to work with them. It was then that Suzanne his wife evinced admirable affection, good sense, and courage, in such wise as to set him on his feet again. She reminded him that her own million, her dowry, was intact. And she insisted on having the situation retrieved by selling the Parc-Monceau mansion, which they would now be unable to keep up. Another million was found in that way. But how were they to live, particularly in Paris, on the proceeds of two millions of francs, when six had not sufficed, for temptation would assuredly come again at the sight of all the luxury consuming the great city? A chance encounter at last decided the future.

Boisgelin had a poor cousin, a certain Delaveau, the son of one of his father's sisters, whose husband, an unlucky inventor, had left her miserably poor. Delaveau, a petty engineer, occupied a modest post at a Brias coal-pit at the time when Michel Qurignon committed suicide. Devoured by a craving to succeed, urged on too by his wife, and very well acquainted with the situation of the Abyss, which he felt certain he could restore to prosperity by a new system of organisation, he went to Paris in search of capitalists, and there, one evening in the street, he suddenly found himself face to face with his cousin Boisgelin. Inspiration at once came to him. How was it that he had not previously thought of that wealthy relative who, as it happened, had married a Qurignon? On learning what was the present position of the Boisgelins, now reduced to a couple of millions which they wished to invest as advantageously as possible, Delaveau extended his plans, and at several interviews which he had with his cousin displayed so much assurance, intelligence, and energy, that he ended by convincing him of success. There was really genius in the plan he had devised. The Boisgelins must profit by the catastrophe which had fallen on Michel Qurignon, buy the works for a million francs when they were worth two millions, and start making steel of superior quality which would rapidly bring in large profits. Moreover, why should not the Boisgelins also buy La Guerdache? In the forced liquidation of the



Qurignon fortune they would easily secure it for five hundred thousand francs, although it had cost eight hundred thousand; and Boisgelin out of his two millions would then still have half a million left to serve as working capital for the Abyss. He, Delaveau, absolutely contracted to increase that capital tenfold and supply the Boisgelins with a princely income. They would simply have to leave Paris, and live happily and comfortably at La Guerdache, pending the accumulation of the large fortune which they would assuredly possess some day, when they might once more return to Parisian life to enjoy it amidst all the magnificence they could dream of.

It was Suzanne who at last secured the compliance of her husband, who felt anxious at the idea of leading a provincial life in which he would probably be bored to death. She herself was delighted to return to La Guerdache, where she had spent her childhood and youth. Thus matters were settled as Delaveau had foreseen. The liquidation of the Qurignon estate took place; and the fifteen hundred thousand francs which the Boisgelins paid for the Abyss and La Guerdache proved barely sufficient to meet the liabilities, in such wise that Suzanne and her husband became absolute masters of everything, having no further accounts to render to the other surviving heirs—that is, Aunt Laure the nun, and André, the infirm and mentally afflicted young fellow who had been sent to a private asylum. On the other hand Delaveau carried out all his engagements, reorganised the works, renewed the plant, and proved so successful in his management that at the end of the first twelve months the profits were already superb. In three years the Abyss recovered its position as one of the most prosperous steel works of the region; and the money earned for Boisgelin by its twelve hundred workpeople enabled him to instal himself at La Guerdache on a footing of great luxury: he had six horses in his stables, five carriages in his coach-house, and organised shooting-parties, dinner-parties, and all sorts of festivities, to which the local authorities eagerly sought invitations. Thus he who during the earlier months had gone about idle and dreary, quite Paris-sick, now seemed to have accustomed himself to provincial life, having discovered as it were a little empire, where, his vanity found every satisfaction. Moreover there was a secret cause behind all other things, an element of victorious conceit in the quietly condescending manner in which he reigned over Beauclair.

Delaveau had installed himself at the Abyss, where he occupied Blaise Qurignon's former house with his wife Fernande and their little girl Nise, who at that time was only a few months old. He had then completed his thirty-seventh year, and his wife was ten years younger. Her mother, a music teacher, had formerly resided on the same floor as himself in a dark house of the Rue Saint-Jacques in Paris. Fernande was of such dazzling, sovereign beauty that for more than a twelvemonth, whenever Delaveau met her on the stairs, he drew back trembling against the wall like one who felt ashamed of his ugliness and his poverty. At last, however, salutes were exchanged, and an acquaintance having sprung up, the girl's mother confided to him that she had lived for twelve years in Russia as a governess, and that Fernande was her daughter by a Russian prince by whom she had been deceived. This prince, who was extremely attached to her, would certainly have dowered her with a fortune, but one evening at the close of a day's hunt he was accidentally shot dead, and she then had to return penniless to Paris with her little girl, and once more give lessons there. Only by the most desperate hard work did she manage to bring up the child, for whom, in spite of everything, she dreamt of some prodigious destiny.

Fernande, reared amidst adulation from her cradle, convinced that her beauty destined her for a throne, encountered in lieu thereof the blackest wretchedness, unable to throw her worn-out boots aside since she knew not how to replace them, and being for ever obliged to repair and refurbish her old gowns and hats. Anger and such a craving for victory soon took possession of her, that from her tenth year onward she did not live a day without learning more and more hatred, envy, and cruelty, in this wise amassing extraordinary force of perversity and destructiveness. The climax came when, imagining that her beauty was bound to conquer by virtue of its all-mightiness, she yielded to a man of wealth and power who, on the morrow, refused to have anything more to do with her. This adventure, which she sought to bury in the bitterest depths of her being, taught her the arts of falsehood, hypocrisy, and craftiness, which she had not previously mastered. She vowed that she would not stumble in that way again, for she was far too ambitious to lead a life of open shame. She realised that it was not sufficient for a woman to be beautiful; that she must find the proper

opportunity to display her beauty, and must meet a man such as she could bewitch and turn into her obedient slave. And her mother having died after trudging for a quarter of a century through the mud of Paris to give lessons which barely yielded enough money to buy bread, she, Fernande, felt a first opportunity arise on finding herself in presence of Delaveau, who, whilst neither handsome nor rich, offered to marry her. She did not care a pin for him, but she perceived that he was very much in love with her, and she decided to avail herself of his arm to enter the world of respectable women in which he would prove a support and a means towards the end that she had in view. He had to buy her a trousseau, taking her just as he found her, with all the faith of a devotee for whom she was a goddess. And from that time forward destiny followed its course even as she, Fernande, had desired. Within two months of being introduced at La Guerdache by her husband, she designedly entered upon an intrigue with Boisgelin, who had become passionately enamoured of her. In that handsome clubman and horseman she found the ideal lover for whom she had sought, the lover all vanity, folly and liberality, who was capable of the worst things in order to retain his beautiful mistress beside him. And it so happened, moreover, that she thus satisfied all sorts of spite and rancour, the covert hatred which she bore her husband, whose toilsome life and quiet blindness humiliated her, and the growing jealousy which she felt towards the quiet Suzanne, whom she had detested from the very first day; this, indeed, being one of the reasons why she had listened to Boisgelin, for she hoped thereby to make Suzanne suffer. And now all was festivity at La Guerdache: Fernande reigned there like a beautiful guest, realising her dream of a life of display, in which she helped Boisgelin to squander the money which Delaveau wrung in perspiration from the twelve hundred toilers of the Abyss. And, indeed, she even hoped that she would some fine day be able to return to Paris and triumph there with all the promised millions.

Such were the stories which occupied Luc's thoughts as, sauntering along, he repaired to La Guerdache in accordance with Suzanne's invitation. If he did not know everything as yet, he at least already suspected certain matters, which the near future was to enable him to fathom completely. At last, as he raised his head, he perceived

that he was only a hundred yards or so from the fine park whose great trees spread their greenery over a large expanse. Then he paused, whilst before his mind's eye there arose above all other figures that of Monsieur Jérôme, the second Qurignon, the founder of the family fortune, the infirm paralysed man whom only the day before he had met in his bath-chair, pushed along by a servant near the very entrance of the Abyss. He pictured him with his lifeless, stricken legs, his silent lips, and his clear eyes which for a quarter of a century had been gazing at the disasters that overwhelmed his race. There was his son Michel, hungering for pleasure and luxury, imperilling the works, and killing himself as the result of a frightful family drama. There was his grandson Gustave, carrying off his father's mistress and dashing his brains out in the depths of a precipice, as beneath the vengeful pursuit of the Furies. There was his daughter Laure, in a convent, cut off from the world; and there was his younger son Philippe, marrying an unworthy woman, gliding with her into the mire, and losing his life in a duel after the most disgraceful adventures; and there was his other grandson André, the last of the name, a cripple, shut up amongst the insane. And yet even now the disaster was continuing; the annihilation of the family was being completed by an evil ferment, that Fernande who had appeared among them as if to consummate their ruin with those terrible, sharp, white teeth of hers. Amidst his long silence Jérôme had witnessed and was witnessing all those things. But did he remark them, did he judge them? It was said that his mind had become weak, and yet how deep and limpid were his eyes! And if he could think, what thoughts were those that filled his long hours of immobility? All his hopes had crumbled; the victorious strength amassed through a long ancestry of toilers, the energy which he thought he was bound to bequeath to a long line of descendants whose fortune would ever and ever increase, had now blazed away like a heap of straw in the fire of worldly enjoyment! In three generations the reserve of creative power which had required so many centuries of wretchedness and effort to accumulate had been gluttonously consumed. Amidst the eager satisfaction of material cravings, the nerves of the race had become unstrung, refinement had led to destructive degeneracy. Gorged too quickly, unhinged by possession, the race had collapsed amidst all the folly born of wealth. And that royal domain

La Guerdache, which he Jérôme had purchased, dreaming of some day peopling it with numerous descendants, happy couples who would diffuse the blessed glory of his name, how sad he must feel at seeing half its rooms empty, what anger he must experience at seeing it virtually handed over to that strange woman, who brought the final poisonous ferment in the folds of her skirts! He himself lived there in solitude, keeping up an affectionate intercourse solely with his grand-daughter Suzanne, who was the only person still admitted to the large room which he occupied on the ground floor. She, when only ten years old, had already helped to nurse him there, like a loving little girl touched by her poor grand-papa's misfortune. And when she had returned to the spot, a married woman, after the purchase of the family property, she had insisted on her grandfather remaining there, although nothing belonged to him, for he had divided his whole property among his children at the time when paralysis had fallen on him like a thunderbolt.

Suzanne was not without scruples in this matter. It seemed to her that in following Delaveau's advice she and her husband had despoiled the two remaining members of the family, Aunt Laure and André, the cripple. As a matter of fact they were provided for; and thus it was on grandfather Jérôme that she lavished her affection, watching over him like a good angel. But although a smile would appear in the depths of his clear eyes when he fixed them upon her, there remained as it were but two cavities seemingly full of spring water in his frigid, deeply marked countenance, directly the wild life of La Guerdache flitted past him. Was he conscious of it, and did he think about it, and if so were not his thoughts compounded of despair?

Luc found himself at last before the monumental iron gate opening into the Formerie highway at a point whence started a road leading to the neighbouring village of Les Combettes, and he simply had to push a little side gate open in order to reach the royal avenue of elm-trees. Beyond them one saw the château, a huge seventeenth-century pile, quite imposing in its simplicity, with its two upper stories each showing a line of twelve windows, and its raised ground floor, which was reached by a double flight of steps, decorated with some handsome vases. The park, which was of great extent, all copses and lawns, was traversed by the Mionne, which fed a large piece of ornamental water where swans swam to and fro.

Luc was already going towards the steps when a light welcoming laugh made him turn his head. Under an oak-tree, near a stone table surrounded by some rustic chairs, he then perceived Suzanne, who sat there with her son Paul playing near her.

'Why, yes, my friend!' said she, 'I have come down to await my guests, like a countrywoman who is not afraid of the open air. How kind of you to accept my abrupt invitation!'

She smiled at him while offering her hand. She was not pretty, but she was charming, very fair and small, with a delicate round head, curly hair, and eyes of a soft blue. Her husband had always considered her to be somewhat insignificant, never suspecting, it seemed, all the delightful kindness of heart and sterling good sense which lurked beneath her great simplicity.

Luc had taken her hand, and retained it for a moment between both his own.

'It was you who were kind to think of me! I am very, very pleased to meet you again,' he said.

She was three years his elder, and had first met him in a wretched house in the Rue de Bercy, where he had resided when beginning life as an assistant engineer at some adjacent works. Very discreet, and practising charity in person and by stealth, she had been in the habit of calling at this house to see a mason who had been left a widower with six children, two of them little girls. And the young man being in the garret, with these little girls on his knees, one evening when she had brought some food and linen, they had become acquainted. Luc had afterwards had occasion to visit her at the mansion near the Parc Monceau in connection with other charitable undertakings in which they were both interested. A feeling of great sympathy had then gradually drawn them together, and he had become her assistant and messenger in matters known to them alone. Thus he had ended by visiting the mansion regularly, being invited to most of the entertainments there during two successive winters. And it was there too that he had first met the Jordans.

'If you only knew how people regret you, how your departure was lamented!' he added by way of allusion to their former benevolent alliance.

Suzanne made a little gesture of emotion, and replied in a low voice: 'Whenever I think of you, I am distressed that you are not here, for there is so much to be done.'

Luc, however, had just noticed Paul, who ran up with some wild flowers in his hand ; and the young man burst into exclamations at seeing how much the boy had grown. Very fair and slim, he had a gentle, smiling face, and greatly resembled his mother.

'Well,' said the latter gaily, 'he will now soon be seven years old. He is already a little man.'

Seated and talking together like brother and sister in the warm radiance of that September day, Luc and Suzanne became so absorbed in their happy recollections that they did not even perceive Boisgelin descend the steps and advance towards them. Smart of mien, wearing a well-cut country jacket, and a single eye-glass, the master of La Guerdache was a brawny coxcomb with grey eyes, a large nose, and waxed moustaches. He brought his dark brown hair in curls over his narrow brow, which was already being denuded by baldness.

'Good day, my dear Froment,' he exclaimed, with a lisp which he exaggerated so as to be the more in the fashion. 'A thousand thanks for consenting to make one of us.'

Then, without more ado, after a vigorous hand-shake à l'Anglaise, he turned to his wife : 'I say, my dear, I hope orders were given to send the victoria to Delaveau's.'

There was no occasion for Suzanne to reply, for just then the victoria came up the avenue of elms, and the Delaveaus alighted before the stone table. Delaveau was a short, broad-shouldered man, possessing a bull-dog's head, massive, low, and with projecting jaw-bones. With his snub nose, big goggle eyes, and fresh-coloured cheeks half hidden by a thick black beard, he carried himself in a military, authoritative manner. A delightful contrast was presented by his wife Fernande, a tall and supple brunette with blue eyes and superb shoulders. Never had more sumptuous or blacker hair crowned a more pure or whiter countenance, with large azure eyes of glowing tenderness, and a small fresh mouth whose little teeth seemed to be of unchangeable brilliancy, and strong enough to break pebbles. She herself, however, was proudest of her delicately shaped feet, in which she found an incontestable proof of her princely origin.

She immediately apologised to Suzanne, whilst making a maid alight with her daughter Nise, who was now three years of age and as fair as her mother was dark, having a curly tumbled head, eyes blue like the sky, and a pink mouth which

was ever laughing, dimpling the while both her cheeks and her chin.

'You must excuse me, my dear,' said Fernande, 'but I profited by your authorisation to bring Nise.'

'Oh, you have done quite right,' Suzanne responded; 'I told you there would be a little table.'

The two women appeared to be on friendly terms. One could scarcely detect a slight fluttering of Suzanne's eyelids when she saw Boisgelin hasten to Fernande, who, however, must have been sulking with him, for she received him in the icy manner which she was wont to assume whenever he tried to escape one of her caprices. Looking somewhat anxious, he came back to Luc and Delaveau, who had made one another's acquaintance during the previous spring, and were now shaking hands together. Nevertheless, the young man's presence at Beauclair seemed somewhat to upset the manager of the Abyss.

'What! you arrived here yesterday? Of course then you did not find Jordan at home, since he was so suddenly called to Cannes. Yes, yes, I was aware of that, but I did not know that he had sent for you. He has some trouble in hand with respect to his blast-furnace.'

Luc was surprised at the other's keen emotion, and divined that he was about to ask him why Jordan had summoned him to La Crêcherie. He did not understand the reason of such sudden disquietude, and so he answered chancewise: 'Trouble, do you think so? Everything seems to be going on all right.'

However, Delaveau prudently changed the subject, and gave Boisgelin some good news. China, said he, had just purchased a stock of defective shells which he had intended to recast. And a diversion came when Luc, who was extremely fond of children, made merry on seeing Paul give his flowers to Nise, who was his very particular friend. 'What a pretty little girl!' exclaimed the young man, 'she is so golden that she looks like a little sun. How is it possible when her papa and mamma are so dark?'

Fernande, who had bowed to Luc, while giving him a keen glance to ascertain if he were likely to prove a friend or an enemy, was fond of having such questions put to her; for, putting on a glorious air, she invariably replied by some allusions to the child's grandfather, the famous Russian prince.



'Oh! a superbly built man, very fair and fresh-coloured. I am sure that Nise will be the very image of him.'

By this time Boisgelin had apparently come to the conclusion that it was not the correct thing to await one's guests under an oak tree—only commonplace *bourgeois* after retiring from business into the country could venture to do so—and accordingly he led the whole party towards the drawing-room. At that moment Monsieur Jérôme made his appearance, in his little conveyance propelled by a servant. The old man had insisted on living quite apart from the other inmates of La Guerdache; he had his own hours for rising, going to bed, and going out; and he invariably took his meals by himself. He would not let the others occupy themselves with him, and indeed it was an established rule in the house that he should not even be spoken to. Thus, when he suddenly appeared before them they contented themselves with bowing in silence, Suzanne alone smiling and giving him a long and affectionate glance. On his side Monsieur Jérôme, who was starting on one of those long promenades which at times kept him out of doors the whole afternoon, gazed at the others fixedly like some forgotten onlooker who has ceased to belong to the world and no longer responds to salutations. And beneath the cold keenness of the old man's stare Luc felt his uneasiness, his torturing doubts return.

The drawing-room was a rich and extremely large apartment, hung with red brocatelle and furnished sumptuously in the Louis-Quatorze style. The party had scarcely entered it when some other guests arrived, Sub-Prefect Châtelard, followed by Mayor Gourier, the latter's wife Léonore, and their son Achille. Châtelard, who at forty could still claim to be a good-looking man, was bald, with an aquiline nose, a discreet mouth, and large eyes which shone keenly behind the glasses he wore. He was a piece of Parisian wreckage, who, after losing his hair and his digestion in the capital, had secured the sub-prefecture of Beauclair as an asylum, thanks to an intimate friend who had been pitchforked into office as a minister of state. Deficient in ambition, suffering from a liver complaint, and realising the necessity of rest, he had fallen upon pleasant lines there through making the acquaintance of the beautiful Madame Gourier, with whom he carried on an unclouded *liaison*, which was favourably viewed by those he governed, and even accepted, it was said, by the lady's husband, the latter's thoughts being given elsewhere.

Léonore was still a fine-looking woman at eight-and-thirty, fair, with large regular features, and she outwardly displayed extreme piety, prudishness, and coldness; though according to some accounts an everlasting brazier of passions blazed within her. Gourier, a fat, common-looking man, ruddy, with a swollen neck and a moon-like face, spoke of his wife with an indulgent smile. He paid far more attention to the girls of his boot factory, which he had inherited from his father, and in which he had personally made a fortune. The only remaining tie between his wife and himself was their son Achille, a youth of eighteen, who, although he was very dark, had his mother's regular features and fine eyes, and evinced an amount of intelligence and independence which confounded and annoyed both his parents. On whatever terms they themselves lived together, they at all events showed perfect agreement in the presence of strangers; and, indeed, since Châtelard had made their acquaintance the happiness of their household was cited as an example. Moreover, the administration of the town was greatly facilitated by the close intercourse that prevailed between the sub-prefect and the mayor.

But other guests were now arriving; for instance, Judge Gaume, accompanied by his daughter Lucile, and followed by the latter's betrothed, Jollivet, a captain on the retired list. Gaume, a man with a long head, a lofty brow, and a fleshy chin, was barely five-and-forty, but seemed desirous of remaining forgotten in that out-of-the-way nook Beauclair on account of the terrible tragedy which had wrecked his life. His wife, forsaken by a lover, had one evening killed herself before him, after confessing her fault. And however frigid and severe the judge might seem to be, he had really remained inconsolable, tortured by that terrible catastrophe, and at the present time full of fears for the future of his daughter, to whom he was extremely attached, and who, as she grew up, had become more and more like her mother. Short, and slight, and refined, and of an amorous disposition, with melting eyes set in a bright face crowned with hair of a golden-chestnut hue, Lucile ever reminded her father of her mother's transgression, and for fear lest something similar should happen to her, he had betrothed her as soon as she was twenty to Captain Jollivet, though he realised in doing so that it would be painful for him to part with her and that he would afterwards sink into bitter solitude.

Captain Jollivet, though he looked rather worn for a man

only five-and-thirty years old, was none the less a handsome fellow with a stubborn brow and victorious moustaches. Fever contracted in Madagascar had compelled him to send in his papers; and having just then inherited an income of twelve thousand francs a year, he had decided to establish himself at Beauclair, his native place, and marry Lucile, whose cooing turtle-dove ways had quite upset him. Gaume, who had no fortune of his own, and lived poorly on his pay as a presiding judge, could not decline the proposals of such a suitor. Yet his secret despair seemed to increase, for never had he evinced more severity in applying the law, rigorously following the strict, stern wording of the Code. People said, however, that implacable as he might seem to be, he was really a disheartened man, a disconsolate pessimist who doubted everything, and particularly human justice. If that were true, what must have been his sufferings, the sufferings of a judge who, while asking himself if he has any right to do so, passes sentences on unhappy wretches who are really the victims of everybody's crime?

Soon after the Gaumes came the Mazelles with their daughter Louise, a child three years of age, another guest for the little table. These Mazelles were a perfectly happy couple, two stout folks of the same age—that is, little more than forty—and they had grown so much alike in course of time that each now had the same rosy smiling face, the same gentle parental way as the other. They had spent a hundred thousand francs to install themselves in true *bourgeois* fashion in a fine substantial house surrounded by a fairly large garden near the sub-prefecture; and they lived therein on an income of some fifteen thousand francs a year derived from investments in Rentes, which to their fancy alone seemed safe. Their happiness, the beatitude of their life, which was now spent in doing nothing, had become proverbial. Often were people heard to say: 'Ah! if one could only be like Monsieur Mazelle who does nothing! He's lucky and no mistake!'

To this he answered that he had worked hard during ten years, and was fully entitled to his fortune. The fact was that, after beginning life as a petty commission agent in the coal trade, he had found a bride with a dowry of fifty thousand francs, and had been skilful or perhaps simply lucky enough to foresee the strikes, whose frequent recurrence over a period of nearly ten years were destined to bring about a considerable rise in the prices of French coal. His great stroke had

consisted in making sure at the lowest possible prices of some very large stocks of coal abroad and in re-selling them at a huge profit to French manufacturers when a sudden failure in their own supplies was forcing them to close their works. At the same time Mazelle had shown himself a perfect sage, retiring from business when he was nearly forty—that is, as soon as he found himself in possession of the six hundred thousand francs which, according to his calculation, would ensure his wife and himself a life of perfect felicity. He had not even yielded to the temptation of trying to make a million, for he was far too much afraid that fortune might play him false. And never had egotism triumphed more serenely, never had optimism a greater right to say that everything was for the best in the best of worlds, than in the case of these perfectly worthy people, who were very fond of one another and of that tardy arrival, their little girl. Fully satisfied, free from all feverishness, having no further ambition to satisfy, they presented a perfect picture of happiness—the happiness which shuts itself up and does not even glance at the unhappiness of others. The only little flaw in this happiness lay in the circumstance that Madame Mazelle, a very plump and blooming dame, imagined that she was afflicted with some serious, nameless, undefinable complaint, on which account she was all the more coddled by her ever-smiling husband, who spoke with a kind of tender vanity about ‘my wife’s illness’ in the same way as he might have spoken of ‘my wife’s wonderful golden hair.’ Withal, this supposed illness gave rise to no sadness or fear. And it was simply with astonishment that the worthy couple contemplated their little girl, Louise, who was growing up so unlike either of them—that is, dark, thin, and quick, with an amusing little head, which, with its obliquely set eyes and slender nose, suggested that of a young goat. This astonishment of theirs was rapturous, as if the child had fallen from heaven as a present, to bring a little life into their sunshiny house, which fell asleep so easily during their long hours of placid digestion. Beauclair society willingly made fun of the Mazelles, comparing them to pullets in a fattening pen, but it none the less respected them, bowed to them, and invited them to its entertainments; for with their fortune, which was so safe and substantial, they reigned over the workers, the poorly, paid officials, and even the millionaire capitalists, since the latter were always liable to some catastrophe.

At last the only other guest expected at La Guerdache that day, Abbé Marle, the rector of St. Vincent, the rich parish of Beauclair, arrived, none too soon, however, for the others were about to enter the dining-room. He apologised for being late, saying that his duties had detained him. He was a tall, strong man, with a square-shaped face, a beak-like nose, and a large firm mouth. Still young, only six-and-thirty, he would willingly have battled for the Faith had it not been for a slight impediment of speech which rendered preaching difficult. This explained why he was resigned to burying himself alive at Beauclair. The expression of his dark stubborn eyes alone testified to his past dream of a militant career. He was not without intelligence, he perfectly understood the crisis through which Catholicism was passing, and whilst preserving silence with respect to the fears which he sometimes experienced when he saw his church deserted by the masses, he clung strictly to the letter of the Church's dogmas, feeling certain that the whole of the ancient edifice would be swept away should science and the spirit of free examination ever effect a breach in it. Moreover, he accepted the invitations to La Guerdache without any illusions concerning the virtues of the *bourgeoisie*. Indeed, he lunched and dined there in some measure from a spirit of duty, in order to hide the sores whose existence he divined there under the cloak of religion.

Luc was delighted with the gay brightness and pleasant luxuriousness of the spacious dining-room which occupied one end of the ground floor, and had a number of large windows overlooking the lawns and trees of the park. All that verdure seemed to belong to the room, which, with its pearl-grey woodwork and hangings of a soft sea-green, became like the banquetting-hall of some idyllic *féerie champêtre*. And the richness of the table, the whiteness of the napery, the blaze of the silver and crystal, the flowers, too, spread over the board, were a festival for the eyes amidst a wondrous setting of light and perfume. So keenly was Luc impressed by it all, that his experiences on the previous evening suddenly arose before his mind's eyes, and he pictured the black and hungry toilers tramping through the mud of the Rue de Brias, the puddlers and drawers roasting themselves before the hellish flames of the furnaces, and particularly Bonnaire in his wretched home, and the woeful Josine seated on the stairs, saved from starving that night, thanks to the loaf which her

little brother had stolen. How much unjust misery there was! And on what accursed toil, what hateful suffering was based the luxury of the idle and the happy!

At table, where covers were laid for fifteen, Luc found himself placed between Fernande and Delaveau. Contrary to proper usage, Boisgelin, who had Madame Mazelle on his right, had placed Fernande on his left. He ought to have assigned that seat to Madame Gourier, but in friendly houses it was understood that Léonore ought always to be placed near her friend Sub-Prefect Châtelard. The latter naturally occupied the place of honour on Suzanne's right hand, Judge Gaume being on her left. As for Abbé Marle, he had been placed next to Léonore, his most assiduous and preferred penitent. Then the betrothed couple, Captain Jollivet and Lucile, sat at one end of the table facing young Achille Gourier, who, at the other end, remained silent between Delaveau and the abbé. And Suzanne, full of foresight, had given orders for the little table to be set behind her, so that she might be near to watch it. Seven-year-old Paul presided over it between three-year-old Nise and three-year-old Louise, who both behaved in a somewhat disquieting fashion, for their little paws were continually straying over the plates and into the glasses. Luckily a maid remained beside them, while at the larger table the waiting was done by the two valets, whom the coachman assisted.

As soon as the scrambled eggs, accompanied by sauterne, had been served, a general conversation was started. Reference was made to the bread supplied by the Beauclair bakers.

'It was impossible for me to get used to it,' said Boisgelin. 'Their fancy bread is uneatable, so I get mine from Paris.'

He said this in the simplest manner possible, but they all glanced with vague respect at their rolls. However, the unpleasant occurrences of the previous evening still haunted every mind, and Fernande exclaimed: 'By the way, do you know that they pillaged a baker's shop in the Rue de Brias last night?'

Luc could not help laughing. 'Oh, madame, pillaged!' said he, 'I was there. It was simply a wretched child who stole a loaf.'

'We were there too,' declared Captain Jollivet, ruffled by the compassionate, excusing tone of the young man's voice. 'It is much to be regretted that the child was not arrested, at least for example's sake.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' Boisgelin resumed. 'It seems that there has been a lot of thievery since that wretched strike. I have been told of a woman who broke open a butcher's till. All the tradespeople complain that prowlers fill their pockets with things set out for sale. . . And so our beautiful new prison is now receiving tenants—is that not so, Monsieur le Président?'

Gaume was about to answer when the Captain violently resumed: 'Yes, theft unpunished begets pillage and murder. The spirit predominating among the working-class population is becoming something frightful. Some of you were out in the town yesterday evening like I was. Didn't you notice that spirit of revolt, of passing menace—a kind of terror that made the town tremble? Besides, that Anarchist, Lange, did not hesitate to tell you what he intended doing. He shouted that he would blow up Beauclair and sweep away the ruins. As he, at any rate, is under lock and key, I hope that he will be sharply looked after.'

Jollivet's outspokenness astonished everybody. What was the use of recalling that gust of terror of which he spoke, and which the others like himself had felt passing—why revive it, as it were, at that pleasant table laden with such nice and beautiful things? A chill spread round; the threat of what the morrow might bring forth resounded in the ears of all those nervous *bourgeois* amidst the deep silence, whilst the valets came and went, offering trout.

Realising that the silence was embarrassing everybody, Delaveau at last exclaimed: 'Lange shows a detestable spirit. The Captain's right; as the rascal is under lock and key he should be kept there.'

But Judge Gaume was wagging his head. At last, in his severe way, his countenance quite rigid, in such wise that one could not tell what might lurk behind his professional stiffness, he retorted, 'I must inform you that this morning the investigating magistrate, acting on my advice, after subjecting the man to a simple interrogatory, made up his mind to release him.'

Protests arose, concealing real fear beneath humorous exaggeration: 'Oh, do you want us all to be murdered then, Monsieur le Président?'

Gaume replied by slowly waving his hand, a gesture which might mean many things. After all, the wise course was certainly to refrain from imparting, by some uproarious

trial at law, any excessive importance to the words which Lange had cast to the winds, for the more those words were spread, the more would they bear fruit.

Jollivet, who had calmed down, sat gnawing his moustaches, for he did not wish to contradict his future father-in-law openly. But Sub-Prefect Châtelard, who had hitherto contented himself with smiling, in the affable way of a man who puts faith in nothing, exclaimed: 'Ah! I quite understand your views, Monsieur le Président. What you have done is, in my opinion, excellent policy. The spirit of the masses is not worse at Beauclair than it is elsewhere. That spirit is everywhere the same; one must strive to accustom oneself to it; and the proper course is to prolong the present state of things as much as possible, for it seems certain that when a change comes it will be for the worse.'

Luc fancied that he could detect some jeering irony in the words and manner of that ex-reveller of Paris, who was doubtless amused by the covert terror of the provincial *bourgeois* around him. Moreover, Châtelard's practical policy was summed up entirely in what he had said; apart from that he evinced superb indifference, no matter what minister might be in office. The old Government machine continued working from force of acquired motion; there was grating and there were jolts, and things would fall to pieces and crumble into dust as soon as the new social system might appear. There would be a nasty tumble at the end of the journey, as Châtelard, laughing, was wont to say among his intimates. The machine rolled on because it was wound up, but at the first really serious jolt it would go to the deuce. Even the vain efforts that were attempted to strengthen the crazy old coach, the timid reforms which were essayed, the useless new laws which men voted without even daring to put the old ones into force, the furious surging of ambitions and personalities, the wild, rageful battling of parties, were only calculated to aggravate and hasten the supreme agony. Such a *régime* must feel astonished every morning at finding itself still erect, and must say to itself that the downfall would surely occur on the morrow. He, Châtelard, being in no wise a fool, arranged matters so as to last as long as the *régime* did. A prudent Republican, as it was needful to be, he represented the Government just sufficiently to retain his post, doing only what was necessary, and desiring above all things to live in peace with those under his jurisdiction. And if everything



should topple over, he at all events would try not to be under the ruins!

'You see very well,' he concluded, 'that the unfortunate strike which rendered us all so anxious has ended in the best manner possible.'

Mayor Gourrier was not endowed with the sub-prefect's caustic philosophy, although as a rule they agreed together in such wise as to facilitate the administration of the town. He now protested: 'Allow me, allow me, my dear friend, too many concessions might carry us a long way. I know the working classes, I am fond of them, I am an old Republican, a democrat of the early days. But if I grant the workers the right to improve their lot, I will never accept the subversive theories, those ideas of the Collectivists, which would bring all civilised society to an end.'

In his loud but trembling voice rang out the fears which he had lately experienced, the ferocity of a threatened *bourgeois*, the innate desire for repression which had at one moment displayed itself in a desire to summon the military, in order that the strikers might be forced to resume work under the penalty of being shot.

'Well, for my part, I've done everything for the work-people at my factory,' he continued; 'they've got relief funds, pension funds, cheap dwellings, every advantage imaginable. So what more can they want? It seems as if the world were coming to an end—is that not so, Monsieur Delaveau?'

The manager of the Abyss had so far continued eating ravenously, and listening, scarcely taking part in the conversation.

'Oh, coming to an end,' said he, in his quiet energetic manner; 'I certainly hope that we sha'n't allow the world to end without fighting a little to make it last. I am of the same opinion as Monsieur le Sous-Préfet, the strike has ended very well. And I have even had some good news. Bonnaire, the Collectivist, the leader whom I was compelled to take back, has done justice to himself—he quitted the works last night. He is an excellent workman, no doubt; but he's wrong-headed—a dangerous dreamer. And it is dreaming that leads one to precipices.'

He went on talking, striving to appear very loyal and just. Each had a right to defend his own interests. By going out on strike the workmen fancied that they were serving their interests. He, as manager of the works, defended the capital,

the plant, the property entrusted to him. And he was willing to show some indulgence, since he felt himself to be the stronger. His one duty was simply to maintain what existed, the working of the wage-system such as it had been organised by the wisdom born of experience. All practical truth centred in that; apart from it there were but criminal dreams, such as that Collectivism, the enforcement of which would have brought about the most frightful catastrophes. He also spoke of workmen's unions and syndicates, which he resisted energetically, for he divined that they might prove a powerful engine of war. At the same time he triumphed like an active hard-working manager, who was well pleased that the strike had not caused greater ravages or become a positive disaster, in such wise as to prevent him from carrying out his engagements with his cousin that year.

Just then the two valets were handing round some roast partridges, whilst the coachman, acting as butler, offered some St. Émilion.

'And so,' said Boisgeline, in a bantering way, 'you promise me that we sha'n't be reduced to potatoes, and that we may eat those partridges without any twinges of remorse?'

A loud burst of laughter greeted this jest, which was deemed extremely witty.

'I promise it,' gaily said Delaveau, who laughed like the others. 'You may eat and sleep in peace—the revolution which is to carry away your income won't take place to-morrow.'

Luc, who remained silent, could feel his heart beating. That was indeed the position, the wage system, the capitalist exploiting the labour of the others. He advanced five francs, made them produce seven francs, by making the workmen toil, and spent the two francs profit. At least, however, that man Delaveau worked, exerted his brain and his muscles; but by what right did Boisgeline, who had never done anything, live and eat in such luxury? Luc was struck, too, by the demeanour of Fernande, who sat beside him. She appeared to be greatly interested in that conversation, though it seemed little suited to women. She grew both excited and delighted over the defeat of the toilers and the victory of that wealth which she devoured like the young wolf she was. Her red lips curved over, displaying her sharp teeth while she laughed the laugh of cruelty, as if indeed she were at last satisfying her rancour and her cravings, in front of the gentle woman whom she was deceiving, between her foppish lover, whom she dominated,

and her blind husband, who was gaining future millions for her. She seemed to be already intoxicated by the flowers, the wines, and the viands, intoxicated especially by perverse delight at employing her radiant beauty to bring disorder and destruction into that home.

'Isn't there some question of a charity bazaar at the sub-prefecture?' asked Suzanne of Châtelard in a soft voice. 'Suppose we talk of something else besides politics?'

The gallant sub-prefect immediately adhered to her views: 'Yes, certainly, it is unpardonable on our part. I will give every *fête* you may desire, dear madame.'

From that moment the general conversation ceased; each reverted to his or her favourite subject. Abbé Marle had contented himself with nodding approvingly in response to certain declarations made by Delaveau. The priest behaved with great prudence in that circle, for he was distressed by the misconduct of Boisgelin, the scepticism of the sub-prefect, and the open hostility of the mayor, who made a parade of anti-clerical ideas. Ah! how the abbé's gorge rose at the thought of that social system which he was called upon to support, and which ended in such a *débâcle*! His only consolation was the devout sympathy of Léonore, who sat beside him, muttering pretty phrases whilst the others argued. She likewise transgressed, but at least she confessed her faults, and he could already picture her at the tribunal of penitence, accusing herself of having derived too much pleasure at that lunch from the attentions of Sub-Prefect Châtelard, who sat on her other hand.

Like the priest, worthy Monsieur Mazelle, who remained almost forgotten between Judge Gaume and Captain Jollivet, had only opened his mouth to take in quantities of food, which he chewed very slowly, owing to his fears of indigestion. Political matters no longer interested him, since, thanks to his income, he had placed himself beyond the reach of storms. Nevertheless he was compelled to lend ear to the theories of the captain, who was eager to pour forth his feelings on such a quiet listener. The army, so the captain said, was the school of the country. France, in accordance with her immutable traditions, could only be a warlike nation, and would only recover equilibrium when she reconquered Europe and reigned by force of arms. It was stupid of people to accuse military service of disorganising labour. What labour, whose labour, indeed? Did anything of that exist? Socialism! why it

was a stupendous farce! There would always be soldiers, and down below there must be people to do the fatigue duties. A sabre could at any rate be seen, but who had ever seen the Idea, that famous Idea, the pretended Queen of the Earth. The captain laughed at his own wit; and worthy Mazelle, who felt profound respect for the army, complacently laughed with him; whilst Lucile, his betrothed, examined him in silence with the side-long glances of an enigmatical *amorosa*, smiling faintly and strangely the while, as if amused to think what a husband he would make. Meantime, at the other end of the table, young Achille Gourier immured himself in the silence of a witness and a judge, his eyes gleaming with all the contempt which he felt for his parents and the friends with whom they compelled him to take lunch.

However, at the moment when a *pâté* of ducks' liver, a perfect marvel, was being served, another voice arose, and was heard by everybody—it was that of Madame Mazelle, hitherto silent, busy with her plate and her mysterious complaint which required ample nourishment. Finding herself neglected by Boisgeline, whose attention was given entirely to Fernande, she had ultimately fallen on Gourier, to whom she gave particulars about her home, her perfect agreement with her husband, and her ideas of the manner in which she meant to have her daughter Louise educated.

'I won't let them worry her brain, ah! no, indeed! why should she worry? She's an only child, she will inherit all our Rentes.'

All at once, without reflecting, Luc yielded to his desire to protest: 'But don't you know, madame,' said he, 'that they are going to suppress the right of inheritance? Oh yes, very soon, directly the new social system is organised.'

All round the table it was thought that he was jesting, and Madame Mazelle's stupefaction was so comical to behold that everybody helped on the joke. The right of inheritance suppressed! How infamous! What! the money earned by the father would be taken from the children, and they in their turn would have to earn their own bread? Why, yes, of course, that was the logical outcome of Collectivism. Mazelle, quite scared by it all, came to his wife's help, saying that he did not feel anxious, for his whole fortune was invested in State Rentes, and nobody would ever dare to touch the national ledgers.

'That's just where you make a mistake, monsieur,' Luc

quietly resumed; 'the national ledgers will be burnt and Rentes will be abolished. It is already resolved upon.'

At this the Mazelles nearly suffocated. Rentes abolished! It seemed to them that this was as impossible as the fall of the sky upon their heads. And they were so distracted, so terrified by the threat of such an inversion of the laws of nature that Châtelard good-naturedly decided to reassure them. Turning slightly towards the little table, where, in spite of Paul's fine example, the little girls Nise and Louise had not behaved particularly well, he said in a bantering fashion: 'No, no, all that won't happen to-morrow; your little girl will have time to grow up and have children of her own—only it will be as well to clean her, for I fancy that she has been dipping her face in the whipped cream.'

They went on jesting and laughing. Yet one and all had felt the great breath of To-morrow passing, the breeze of the Future blowing across the table, whence it swept away iniquitous luxury and poisonous enjoyment. And they all rushed to the help of Rentes and capital, the *bourgeois* and capitalist society based upon the wage system.

'The Republic will kill itself on the day it touches property,' said Mayor Gourier.

'There are laws, and everything would crumble to pieces on the day they might cease to be enforced,' said Judge Gaume.

'Dash it! the army's there at all events, and the army won't allow the rogues to triumph,' said Captain Jollivet.

'Let God act, He is all kindness and justice,' said Abbé Marle.

Boisgelin and Delaveau contented themselves with approving, for it was to their help that all the social forces hastened. And Luc understood the position clearly: it was the Government, the administration, the magistracy, the army, the clergy which sustained the decaying social system, the monstrous structure of iniquity in which the murderous toil of the greater number fed the corrupting sloth of the few. This was another phase of the terrible vision which he had beheld the previous day. After gazing upon the rear he now saw the front of that rotting social edifice which was collapsing upon every side. And even here, amidst all that luxury and those triumphal surroundings, he had again heard it cracking. He could detect that those people were all anxious

but strove to forget and to divert their minds whilst rushing on towards the precipice.

The dessert was now being served, and the table was covered with pastry and magnificent fruit. The better to bring back the good spirits of the Mazelles, the others, as soon as the champagne was poured out, began to sing the praises of idleness, divine idleness, which belongs not to this world. And then Luc, as he continued reflecting, suddenly understood what it was that weighed upon his mind: it was the problem of how the future might be freed, in presence of those folks who represented the unjust and tyrannical authority of the past.

After coffee, which was served in the drawing-room, Boisselin suggested a stroll through the park as far as the farm. Throughout the repast he had been prodigal in his attentions to Fernande, but she still gave him the cold shoulder, refraining even from answering him, and reserving her bright smiles for the sub-prefect seated in front of her. Matters had been like this for a week past, and were always so when he did not immediately satisfy one of her caprices. The real cause of their present quarrel was that she had insisted on his giving a stag-hunt for the sole delight of showing herself at it in a new and appropriate costume. He had taken the liberty to refuse, as the expenses would be very great; and, moreover, Suzanne, having been warned of the matter, had begged him to be a little reasonable. Thus a struggle had ended by breaking out between the two women, and it was a question which of them would win the victory, the wife or the other.

During lunch Suzanne's sad and gentle eyes had missed nothing of Fernande's affected coldness and her husband's anxious attentions. And so when the latter proposed a stroll she understood that he was simply seeking an opportunity to be alone with her sulky rival, in order to defend himself and win her back. Greatly hurt by this, but incapable of battling, Suzanne sought refuge in her suffering dignity, saying that she should remain indoors in order to keep the Mazelles company. For they, from considerations of health, never bestirred themselves on leaving table. Judge Gaume, his daughter Lucile, and Captain Jollivet also declared that they should not go out; and this led to Abbé Marle proposing to play the judge a game of chess. Young Achille Gourier had already taken leave, under pretext that he was preparing for

an examination, but in reality to indulge freely in his favourite reveries as he strolled about the country. And so only Boisgelin, the sub-prefect, the Delaveaus, the Gouriers, and Luc repaired to the farm, walking slowly towards it under the lofty trees.

On the way thither things passed off very correctly ; the five men walked on together, whilst Fernande and Léonore brought up the rear, deep apparently in some confidential chat. Among the men Boisgelin had now begun to bewail the misfortunes of agriculture : the soil was becoming bankrupt, said he, and all who tilled it were hastening to ruin. Châtelard and Gourier agreed that the terrible problem for which no solution had hitherto been found lay in the direction of agriculture : for in order that the industrial workman might produce, it was necessary that bread should be cheap, and if corn fetched only a low price, the peasant, reduced to beggary, could no longer purchase the products of industry. Delaveau, for his part, believed that a solution might be found in an intelligent system of protection. As for Luc, who took a passionate interest in the matter, he did his utmost to make the others talk, and Boisgelin ended by confessing that his own despair came largely from the continual difficulties that he had with his farmer Feuillat, whose demands increased year by year. He would doubtless have to part with the man when the renewal of the lease was discussed, for the farmer had asked for a reduction of terms amounting to no less than ten per cent. The worst was that, fearing his lease might not be renewed, he had ceased to take proper care of the land, which he no longer manured, since it was not for him, he said, to work for his successor's benefit. This, of course, meant the sterilisation of the property, whose value would thus be annihilated.

'And it's everywhere the same,' continued Boisgelin ; 'people don't agree ; the workers want to take the places of the owners, and agriculture suffers from the quarrel. At Les Combettes now, that village yonder, whose land is only separated from mine by the Formerie road, you can't imagine what little agreement there is among the peasants, what efforts each of them makes to harm his neighbour, paralysing himself the while ! Ah, there was something good in feudality after all ! Those fine fellows would walk straight enough if they had nothing of their own, and were convinced that they would never have anything !'

This abrupt conclusion made Luc smile. Nevertheless, he was struck by the unconscious confession that the pretended bankruptcy of the soil came from a lack of agreement among those who tilled it. The party was now quitting the park, and the young man's glance ranged over the great plain of La Roumagne, formerly so famous for its fruitfulness, but now accused of growing cold and sterile, and of no longer yielding sustenance for its inhabitants. On the left spread the extensive lands of Boisgelin's farm, whilst on the right Luc perceived the humble roofs of Les Combettes, around which were grouped many small fields, cut up into little morsels by repeated partition amongst numerous heirs, in such wise that the whole resembled a stretch of patchwork. And Luc asked himself what could possibly be done in order that cordial agreement might return, in order that from so many contradictory and barren efforts a great impulse of solidarity might spring, with universal happiness for its object.

It so happened that as the promenaders were approaching the farmhouse, a large and fairly well-kept building, they heard some loud swearing and thumping of fists upon a table—in fact, all the uproar of a violent quarrel. Then they saw two peasants, one stout and heavy, and the other thin and nervous, come out of the house, and after threatening one another for a last time, go off, each by a different path, through the fields towards Les Combettes.

'What's the matter, Feuillat?' Boisgelin inquired of the farmer who had come to his threshold.

'Oh! it's nothing, monsieur; only two more fellows of Les Combettes who had a dispute about a boundary, and wanted me to umpire between them. The Lenfants and the Yvonnots have been disputing together from father to son for years and years past, and it maddens them nowadays merely to catch sight of one another. It's of no use my talking reason to them. You heard them just now! They'd like to devour one another. And, *mon Dieu*, what fools they are! they'd be so happy and well off if they would only reflect and agree together a little bit.'

Then, sorry, perhaps, that he had allowed this remark to escape him, for it was not one which the master should have heard, Feuillat let his eyelids fall, and with an expressionless, impenetrable face, resumed in a husky voice: 'Would the ladies and gentlemen like to come in and rest a moment?'



Luc, however, had previously seen the man's eyes glittering. He was surprised to find him so wan and dry, as if his tall slim figure were already grilled by the sunlight, although he was but forty years of age. At the same time Feuillat was possessed of quick intelligence, as the young man soon discovered on listening to his conversation with Boisgelin. When the latter, in a laughing way, inquired if he had thought over the matter of the lease, the farmer wagged his head and answered briefly, like a careful diplomatist desirous of gaining his point. He evidently kept back his real thoughts—the thought that the land ought to belong to those who tilled it, to one and all of them, in order that they might once more love and fertilise it. 'Love the soil!' said he, with a shrug of the shoulders. His father and his grandfather had loved it passionately, but what good had that done to them? For his part, his love could wait until he was able to fertilise the soil for himself and his kindred, and not for a landlord, whose one thought would be to raise the rent as soon as the crops should increase. And there was something else beneath the man's reticence, something that he pictured whenever he tried to peer into the future: a reasonable agreement among the peasantry, the reunion of all the subdivided fields so that they might be worked in common, so that tillage might be carried on upon a vast scale with the help of machinery. Such, indeed, were the few ideas which had gradually come to his mind, ideas which were best kept from the *bourgeoisie*, but which, all the same, occasionally escaped him.

The promenaders had ended by entering the farmhouse to sit down there and rest a moment; and Luc there again found the coldness and bareness, the odour of toil and poverty with which he had been struck so much on the previous evening at Bonnaire's home in the Rue des Trois-Lunes. Dry and ashen, like her man, La Feuillat stood there in an attitude of silent resignation beside her one child, Léon, a big boy of twelve, who already helped his father in the fields. And it was evident to Luc that on all sides, among the peasants as among the industrial workmen, one found labour accursed, dishonoured, regarded as a stain, a disgrace, since it did not even provide food for the slave, who was riveted to his toil as to a chain. In the neighbouring village of Les Combettes the sufferings were certainly greater than at that farm; the dwellings there were sordid dens, the life was that

of domestic animals fed upon sops; the Lenfants, with their son Arsène and their daughter Olanpe, the Yvonnots, who also had two children, Eugénie and Nicolas, all found themselves in filthy abject wretchedness, and added to their woes by their rageful passion to prey on one another. Luc, listening and glancing around him, pictured all the horrors of that social hell, telling himself the while, however, that the solution of the problem lay in that direction, for as soon as a new social system should be perfected one would necessarily have to come back to the earth, the eternal nurse, the common mother who alone could provide men with daily bread.

At last, on leaving the farm, Boisgeline said to Feuillat: 'Well you must think it over, my good fellow. The land has gained in value, and it's only just that I should profit by it.'

'Oh! it's all thought over now, monsieur,' the farmer answered. 'It will suit me just as well to starve on the road as in your farm.' That was his last word.

On the way back to La Guerdache, by another more solitary and shady road of the park, the party of ladies and gentlemen broke up. The sub-prefect and Léonore lingered in the rear, and soon found themselves far behind the others, whilst Boisgeline and Fernande gradually drew upon one side, and disappeared as if mistaking their way, straying into lonely paths amidst their animated conversation. Meantime the two husbands, Gourier and Delaveau, placidly continued following the avenue, talking as they went about an article on the end of the strike that had appeared in the 'Journal de Beauclair,' a little print with a circulation of five hundred copies which was published by a certain Lebleu, a petty clerical-minded bookseller, and which counted among its contributors both Abbé Marle and Captain Jollivet. The mayor deplored that the Deity should have been introduced into the affair, though, like the manager of the Abyss, he approved of the general tone of the article, which was a perfect chant of triumph celebrating the victory of capital over the wage-earners in the most lyric style. Luc, walking near the others, grew weary of hearing their comments on this article; and at last, after manœuvring so as to let them distance him, he plunged among the trees, confident that he would find La Guerdache again as soon as was necessary.

How charming was the solitude amidst those dense thickets through which the warm September sun sent a rain of golden sparks! For a time the young man wandered at

random, well pleased at finding himself alone, at being able to breathe freely in the midst of nature, relieved of the load that had oppressed him in the presence of all those folks who weighed upon his mind and heart. Yet he was thinking of joining them once more, when all at once near the Formerie road he came out into some extensive meadows through which a little branch of the Mionne coursed, feeding a large pond. And the scene which he there encountered greatly amused him, fraught as it was with charm and hope.

Paul Boisgelin had obtained permission to take his two little guests, Nise Delaveau and Louise Mazelle, to this spot. The maids in charge of them were lying down under a willow and gossiping, paying no further attention to the children. But the great feature of the adventure was that the heir of La Guerdache and the young ladies in bibs had found the pond in the possession of some working-class invaders, three youngsters who had either climbed a wall or slipped through a hedge. To his surprise Luc found that the leader and soul of the trespassing expedition was Nanet, behind whom were Lucien and Antoinette Bonnaire. Evidently enough it was Nanet who, profiting by the freedom of Sunday, had led the others astray far from the Rue des Trois Lunes. And the explanation of it all was simple enough. Lucien had fitted a little boat with a mechanism that carried it over the water; and Nanet having offered to take him to a fine pond he knew, one where nobody was ever met, the little boat was now sailing unaided over the clear unrippled pool. To the children it seemed quite a prodigy.

Lucien's stroke of genius had simply consisted in adapting the wheels and clockwork springs of a little toy cart to a boat which he had fashioned out of a piece of deal. This boat travelled quite thirty feet through the water without the spring requiring to be wound afresh; but unfortunately, in order to bring the boat back again it was necessary to use a long pole, which on each occasion almost made the little vessel sink.

Speechless with admiration, Paul and his young lady friends stood on the bank of the pond, watching the wonderful boat. But Louise, with her eyes glittering in her slender face, which suggested that of a playful little goat, was soon carried away by a boundless desire to possess the toy, and thrusting out her little fists she cried repeatedly: 'Want it! Want it!'

Then, as Lucien, with the aid of his pole, brought the

boat back to shore, in order to wind up the spring afresh, she eagerly ran towards him. Good nature and the pleasure of play brought them together.

'I made it, you know,' said the lad.

'Oh! let me see! give it me!' replied the damsel.

But that was asking him too much, and he energetically defended the boat from the approach of her pillaging hands.

'No, no,' said he, 'it gave me too much trouble. Leave go or you'll break it.'

However, finding her very pretty and gay, he became more cordial, and said to her: 'I'll make you another one if you like.'

Then he put the boat in the water again, and the wheels once more began to revolve, whilst Louise accepted his offer, clapping her hands and sitting down on the grass by his side, in her turn won over, and treating him as if he were an habitual playfellow.

Meantime it vaguely occurred to Paul, who was the oldest of the whole party, quite a little man of seven, that he ought to find out who the others were. Noticing Antoinette, he felt emboldened by her amiable demeanour, her healthy, pretty face, so he inquired: 'How old are you?'

'I'm four years old, but papa says I look as if I was six.'

'Who's your papa?'

'Who is papa? why, papa, of course, silly!'

The little minx laughed in such a pretty way that Paul regarded her answer as decisive, and questioned her no further, but sat down by her side, in such wise that they at once became the best friends in the world. She looked so pleasant with her good health and pert expression that he doubtless failed to notice that she wore a very simple woollen frock devoid of all pretensions to elegance.

'And your papa,' said she. 'Do all these trees belong to him? What a lot of room you have to play in! We got in through the hole in the hedge over there, you know.'

'It isn't allowed,' said Paul. 'And I'm not often allowed to come here, since I might fall into the water. But it's so amusing! You mustn't say anything, because we should get punished if you did.'

But all at once a dramatic incident occurred. Master Nanet, who was so fair and wavy-haired, had been standing in admiration before Nise, who was yet fairer and more wavy-haired than himself. They looked like two toys, and they

speedily ran towards one another, as if indeed it were needful that they should pair off, and had been awaiting that meeting. Catching hold of each other's hands they laughed face to face, and played at pushing. Then Nanet, in a spirit of bravado, exclaimed : ' There's no need of a pole to get his boat. I'd go and fetch it in the water, I would ! '

Stirred to enthusiasm, Nise, who likewise favoured extraordinary diversions, seconded the proposal : ' Yes, yes, we all ought to get into the water ! Let's all take our shoes off ! '

Then, however, as she leant over the pond she almost fell into it. At this, all her girlish boastfulness abandoned her, and she raised a piercing shriek when she saw the water wetting her boots. But the lad bravely rushed forward, caught hold of her with his little arms, which were already strong, and carried her like a trophy to the grass, where she again began to laugh and play with him, the pair of them rolling about like a couple of romping kids. Unfortunately the shrill cry which Nise had raised in her fright had roused the maids from their forgetful gossiping under the willow. They rose, and were stupefied at the sight of the invaders, those youngsters who had sprung they knew not whence, and who had the impudence to romp with the children of well-to-do *bourgeois*. The servants hurried up with such angry mien that Lucien hastened to take possession of his boat, for fear lest it should be confiscated, and ran off as fast as his little legs would carry him, followed by Antoinette and even Nanet, who was likewise panic-stricken. They rushed to the hedge, fell flat upon their stomachs, slipped out and disappeared, whilst the servants returned to La Guerdache with their three charges, agreeing between themselves that they would say nothing of what had occurred, in order that nobody might be scolded.

Luc remained alone, laughing, amused by the scene that he had thus come upon, under the paternal sun, in the midst of friendly nature. Ah ! the dear little ones, how soon they agreed together, how easily they overcame all difficulties, ignorant as they were of all fratricidal struggles ; and what hope of a triumphant future they brought with them !

In five minutes the young man reached La Guerdache again, and there he once more fell into the horrible present, reeking of egotism, the hateful battle-field on which all evil passions contended. It was now four o'clock, and the Boisgelins' guests were taking leave.

Luc was most struck, however, on perceiving Monsieur Jérôme reclining in his bath-chair on the left of the flight of steps. The old gentleman had just returned from his long promenade, and had signed to his servant to leave him there a little while in the warmth of the sun, as if indeed he desired to witness the departure of the guests invited to the house that day. On the steps, amongst the ladies and gentlemen all ready to depart, stood Suzanne, waiting for her husband, who had lingered in the park with Fernande. Some minutes had elapsed after the return of the others when she at last saw Boisgelin appear with the young woman. They were walking quietly side by side, and chatting together as if their long stroll were the most natural thing in the world. Suzanne asked no explanations, but Luc plainly saw that her hands trembled, and that an expression of dolorous bitterness passed over her face between her smiles, for she had to play the part of a good hostess and affect amiability. And she felt keenly wounded, and could not help starting when Boisgelin, addressing Captain Jollivet, declared that he should soon go to see him, in order that they might consult together and organise that stag-hunt which hitherto he had but vaguely thought of. Thus the die was cast, the wife was defeated, the other had won the day, had imposed her foolish and wasteful whim upon her lover during that long stroll which for impudence was tantamount to a publicly given assignation. Suzanne's heart rose rebelliously at the thought of it all. Why should she not take her son and go away with him? Then by a visible effort she calmed herself, becoming very dignified and lofty, bent on shielding the honour of her name and her house with all the abnegation of a virtuous woman, relapsing into the silence of heroic affection, that silence in which she had resolved to live, since it would protect her from all the mire around her. Luc, who could divine everything, now only detected her torment in the quiver of her feverish hand when he pressed it on bidding her good-bye.

Monsieur Jérôme, meanwhile, had watched the scene with those eyes of his, clear like spring water, in which one wondered whether there yet lingered intelligence to understand and judge things. And he afterwards witnessed the departure of the guests—that departure which suggested a *défilé* of all the elements of human power, all the social authorities, the masters who served as examples to the masses. Châtelard went off in his carriage with Gourier and Léonore, the latter

of whom offered a seat to Abbé Marle, in such wise that she and the priest sat face to face with the sub-prefect and the mayor. Then Captain Jollivet, who drove a hired tilbury, carried off Judge Gaume and his betrothed Lucile, the former anxiously watching his daughter's languishing turtle-dove airs. Next the Mazelles, who had arrived in a huge landau, climbed into it again as into a soft bed, where they lay back, completing their digestion. And Monsieur Jérôme, to whom they all bowed in silence, according to the custom of the house, watched them all go, like a child may watch passing shadows, without the faintest expression of any feeling appearing on his cold face.

Only the Delaveaus remained, and the manager of the Abyss insisted on giving Luc a lift in Boisgelin's victoria, in order to spare him the necessity of walking. It would be easy enough to set the young man down at his door, since they would pass La Crêcherie on their way. As there was only a folding bracket seat Fernande would take Nise on her lap, and the maid would sit beside the coachman.

'Come, Monsieur Froment, it will be a real pleasure for me to drive you home,' Delaveau insisted in his most obliging way.

Luc ended by accepting the offer. Then Boisgelin clumsily referred to the hunt again, inquiring if the young man would still be at Beauclair in order to attend it. Luc answered that he could not tell how long he might be in the district, but at all events they must not rely on him. Suzanne listened with a smile. Then, her eyes moistening at the thought of his brotherly sympathy, she again pressed his hand, saying: '*Au revoir*, my friend.'

When the victoria eventually started, Luc's eyes for the last time met those of Monsieur Jérôme, which, it seemed to him, were travelling from Fernande to Suzanne, slowly taking note of the supreme destruction with which his race was threatened. But was not that an illusion on Luc's part, was there not in the depths of those eyes merely the emotion, the vague smile which always gleamed therein whenever the old man looked at his dear granddaughter, the only one whom he still loved, and whom he was still willing to recognise?

Whilst the victoria was rolling towards Beauclair Luc promptly learnt why Delaveau had been so anxious to drive him home, for the manager again began to question him about his sudden journey—what its purpose might be, and what

Jordan would do with reference to the management of his blast-furnace now that the old engineer Laroche was dead. One of Delaveau's secret projects had been to buy the blast-furnace as well as the extensive tract of land which separated it from the steel-works, in such wise as to double the value of the Abyss. But the whole constituted a big mouthful, and as he did not expect to have the necessary money for such a purchase for a long time to come, he had only thought of slow, progressive extension. On the other hand, the sudden death of Laroche had now quickened his desires, and he had fancied that he might perhaps be able to come to arrangements with Jordan, whom he knew to be immersed in his favourite scientific studies, and desirous of ridding himself of a business which brought him a deal of worry. This was why the sudden arrival of Luc in response to a summons from Jordan had greatly disturbed Delaveau, who feared that the young man might upset the plans of which he had hitherto only spoken indirectly. At the first questions which the manager put to him in a good-natured way, Luc, although unable to understand everything, became suspicious, and he therefore replied evasively :

'I know nothing, I have not seen Jordan for more than six months,' said he. 'As for his blast-furnace, why, I suppose that he will simply confide the management to some clever young engineer.'

Whilst he spoke, he noticed that Fernande's eyes never left him. Nise had fallen asleep on the young woman's lap, and she kept silence, seemingly greatly interested in the conversation of the others, as if she could divine that her future was at stake, for she had already detected that this young man was an enemy. Had he not sided with Suzanne in the matter of the hunt; had not she, Fernande, seen them in cordial agreement, with their hands clasped like brother and sister? Then, feeling that war was virtually declared between them, she smiled a keen, cruel smile, like one determined on victory.

'Oh! I merely mention the matter,' repeated Delaveau, beating a retreat, 'because I was told that Jordan thought of confining himself to his studies and discoveries. Some of the latter are admirable!'

'Yes, admirable!' repeated Luc, with the conviction of an enthusiast.

At last the carriage stopped before La Crêcherie, and the young man alighted, thanked Delaveau, and found himself alone. He again felt the great quiver that had come upon



him during those two days which beneficent destiny had granted him since his arrival at Beauclair. He had there seen both sides of the hateful world whose framework was falling to pieces from sheer rottenness: the iniquitous misery of some, the pestilential wealth of others. Work, badly remunerated, held in contempt, unjustly apportioned, had become mere torture and shame when it should have been the very nobility, health, and happiness of mankind. Luc's heart was bursting at the thought of it all, and his brain seemed to open as if to give birth to the ideas which he had felt within him for months past. And a cry for justice sprang from his whole being. Ay, there was no other possible mission nowadays than that of hastening to the succour of the wretched, and setting a little justice once more upon the earth.

## IV

THE Jordans were to return to Beauclair on the Monday by a train arriving in the evening. And Luc spent the morning of that day in strolling through the park of La Crêcherie, which was not more than fifty acres in extent, though its exceptional situation, its watercourses and superb greenery, made it quite a paradise, famous throughout the whole region.

The house, a by no means large building of brick, of no particular style, had been erected by Jordan's grandfather in the time of Louis XVIII. on the site of an old château destroyed during the Revolution. Close behind it rose the range of the Bleuse Mountains, that steep gigantic wall which jutted out like a promontory at the point where the Brias gorge opened into the great plain of La Roumagne. Protected in this wise from the north winds, and looking towards the south, the park was like a natural hothouse where eternal springtide reigned.

Thanks to a number of springs gushing forth in crystalline cascades the rocky wall was covered with vigorous vegetation, and goat-paths, flights of steps cut in the stone, ascended to the summit amidst climbing plants and evergreen shrubs. Down below, the springs united, and flowing on in a slow river, watered the whole park, the great lawns, and the clumps of lofty trees, which were of the finest and most vigorous kinds. Jordan had virtually left that luxuriant corner

of nature to look after itself, for he only employed one gardener and two lads, who, apart from attending to the kitchen garden and a few flower-beds below the house-terrace, simply had to keep things somewhat tidy.

Jordan's grandfather, Aurélien Jordan de Beauvisage, was born in 1790 on the eve of the Reign of Terror. The Beauvisages, one of the most ancient and illustrious families of the district, had then already fallen from their high estate, and of their formerly vast territorial possessions they only retained two farms—now annexed to Les Combettes—and between two and three thousand acres of bare rock and barren moor, a broad strip indeed of the lofty plateau of the Bleuse Mountains. Aurélien was less than three years old when his parents were compelled to emigrate, abandoning their flaming château one terrible winter's night. And until 1816 Aurélien had his home in Austria, where his mother and then his father died in swift succession, leaving him in a fearful state of penury, reared in the hard school of manual toil, with no other bread to eat than that which he earned as a worker in an iron mine. He had just completed his twenty-sixth year when, under Louis XVIII., he returned to Beauclair and found the ancestral property still further diminished, for the two farms were lost, and there now only remained the little park and the two or three thousand acres of stones which nobody cared for. Misfortune had democratised Aurélien, who felt that he could no longer be a Beauvisage. Henceforth then he simply signed himself Jordan, and he married the daughter of a very rich farmer of Saint-Cron, his wife's dowry enabling him to build on the site of the old château the *bourgeoise* brick residence in which his grandson now dwelt. But he had become a worker, his hands were still grimy, and he remembered the iron mine and blast-furnace where he had toiled in Austria. Already in 1818 he began to look around him, and, at last, among the desolate rocks of his domain, he discovered a similar mine, the existence of which he had been led to suspect by certain old stories told him by his parents. And then, half-way up the ridge on a kind of natural landing or platform, above La Crêcherie, he installed his own blast-furnace, the first established in the region. From that moment he became absorbed in industrial toil, though without ever realising any very large profits, for he lacked capital, and his life proved one continual battle from that cause. His only title to the gratitude of the district was that by the presence of

*his blast-furnace he brought thither the iron-workers who had created all the great establishments of the present time, among others being Blaise Qurignon, the drawer by whom the Abyss had been founded in 1823.*

Aurélien Jordan had but one son, Séverin, born to him when he was more than five-and-thirty, and it was only when this son replaced him after his death in 1852 that the blast-furnace of La Crêcherie became really important. Séverin had married a Demoiselle Françoise Michon, daughter of a doctor of Magnolles, and his wife proved a woman of exquisite kindness and very superior intelligence. In her were personified the activity, wisdom, and wealth of the household. Guided, loved, and sustained by her, her husband excavated fresh galleries in his mine, increased the output of ore tenfold, and almost rebuilt the furnace in order to endow it with the most perfect plant then known. And thus, amidst the great fortune which they acquired, the only grief of the Jordans was to remain for many years childless. They had been married ten years, and Séverin was already forty, when a son, Martial, was at last born to them; and ten years later they finally had a daughter, Sœurette. This belated fruitfulness crowned their lives; Françoise, who had been so good a wife, proved also a most admirable mother, one who battled victoriously against death on behalf of her son, a weakling, and endowed him with her own intelligence and kindness. Doctor Michon, her father, a humanitarian dreamer, full of divine charitableness, a Fourierist and Saint-Simonian of the first days, withdrew in his old age to La Crêcherie, where his daughter built him a pavilion, the one indeed which Luc had lately occupied. There it was that the doctor died among his books, amidst all the gaiety of sunshine and flowers. And until the death of Françoise, the fondly loved mother, which occurred five years after that of the grandfather and father, La Crêcherie lived on amidst all the joy of never-failing prosperity and felicity.

Martial Jordan was thirty years of age, and Sœurette was twenty, when they first found themselves alone; and five years had now elapsed since that time. He, in spite of his indifferent health, the frequent illnesses of which his mother had cured him by force of love, had passed through the Polytechnic School. But on his return to La Crêcherie, finding himself master of his destiny, thanks to the large fortune he inherited, he had relinquished all thoughts of official

appointments, and had taken passionately to the investigations which the application of electricity offered to studious scientists. On one side of the house he built a very spacious laboratory, installed the necessary machinery for powerful motive force in an adjacent shed, and then gradually took to special studies, surrendering himself almost completely to the dream of smelting ore in electrical furnaces in a practical way adapted to the requirements of industry. And from that time he virtually cloistered himself, lived like a monk, absorbed in his experiments, his great work, which became as it were his very life. Beside him, his sister had now taken his dead mother's place; and indeed, before long Sœurette was like his faithful guardian, his good angel, one who took every care of him, and set round him all the warm affection that he needed. Moreover she managed the household, spared him many material worries, served him as a secretary and assistant-preparator, rendered all sorts of help ever gently and quietly with a placid smile upon her face. The blast-furnace luckily gave no trouble, for the old engineer Laroche, a bequest of Aurélien Jordan, the founder, had been there more than thirty years, in such wise that the present owner, deeply immersed in his studies and experiments, was able to detach himself entirely from business matters. He left the worthy Laroche free to manage the blast-furnace in accordance with the routine of years; for he himself had ceased to bother about possible ameliorations, since he cared nothing for mere relative, transitory improvements now that he had begun to seek the radical change, the art of smelting by electrical means, which would revolutionise the whole world of metallurgical industry. Indeed, it was often Sœurette who had to intervene and come to a decision on certain matters with Laroche, particularly when she knew that her brother's mind was busy with some important investigation, and she did not wish him to be disturbed by any outside matters. Now, however, Laroche's sudden death had so thoroughly upset the usual well-regulated order of things, that Jordan, who deemed himself sufficiently rich, and had no ambition apart from his studies, would willingly have rid himself of the blast-furnace by at once opening negotiations with Delaveau, whose desires were known to him, had not Sœurette more prudently obtained from him a promise that he would in the first place consult Luc, in whom she placed great confidence. Thence had come the pressing call

addressed to the young man which had brought him so suddenly to Beauclair.

Luc had first met the Jordans, brother and sister, at the Boisgelins' residence in Paris, in which city they had established themselves one winter in order to prosecute certain studies successfully. Great sympathy had arisen between them, based, on Luc's side, upon his great admiration for the brother, whose scientific talent transported him, and upon deep affection mingled with respect for the sister, who seemed to him like some divine personification of goodness. He himself was then working with the celebrated chemist Bourdin, studying some iron ores overcharged with sulphur and phosphates which it was desired to turn to commercial use. And Sœurette recalled certain particulars that he had given her brother on this subject one evening which she well remembered. Now, for more than ten years the mine discovered by Aurélien Jordan on the plateau of the Bleuse Mountains had been abandoned, as in the veins reached by the workers sulphur and phosphorus prevailed to such a point that the ore no longer yielded enough metal to pay the cost of extraction. Thus the working of the galleries had ceased, and the smeltery of La Crêcherie was now fed by the Granval mines near Brias; a little railway line bringing the ore, which was of fairly good quality, as well as the coal of the neighbouring pits, to the charging platform of the furnace. But all this was very costly, and Sœurette often thought of those chemical methods, the employment of which, according to what Luc had said, might perhaps enable them to work their own mine afresh. And in her desire to consult the young man before her brother came to a positive decision, she felt too that she ought to know the real value of what would be ceded to Delaveau should a deed of sale indeed be arranged between La Crêcherie and the Abyss.

The Jordans were to arrive at six o'clock, after twelve hours' travelling, and Luc went to wait for them at the railway station, driving thither in the carriage which was to bring them home. Jordan, short and puny, had a somewhat vague, long, and gentle face, with hair and beard of a faded brown. He alighted from the train wrapped in a long fur overcoat, although that fine September day was a warm one. With his keen, penetrating black eyes, in which all his vitality seemed to have taken refuge, he was the first to perceive his friend Luc.

'Ah, my dear fellow!' said he, 'how kind of you to have waited for us! You can't have an idea of the catastrophe that took us away, that poor cousin of ours, dying like that, all alone, yonder, and we having to go and bury him, when there's nothing we hate so much as travelling. . . . Well, it's all over now, and here we are.'

'And the health's good and you are not over-tired?' asked Luc.

'No, not too much. I was fortunately able to sleep.'

But Sœurlette was in her turn coming up, after making sure that none of the travelling-rugs had been left inside the carriage. She was not pretty: like her brother she had a very slight figure, and was pale, complexionless, indeed insignificant after the fashion of a woman who is resigned to being a good housewife and nurse. And yet her tender smiles lent infinite charm to her face, whose only beauty dwelt in its passionate eyes, in the depths of which glowed all the craving for love which lurked within her, but of which she herself was as yet ignorant. Hitherto she had loved none excepting her brother, and him she loved after the fashion of some cloistered maid, who for the sake of her Deity renounces the whole world. Before even speaking to Luc she called: 'Be careful, Martial—you ought to put on your scarf.'

Then, turning towards the young man, she showed herself charming, at once giving proof of the keen sympathy she felt for him: 'How many apologies we owe you, Monsieur Froment! What can you have thought of us when you found us gone on your arrival! Have you been comfortable at all events, have you been properly cared for?'

'Admirably—I've lived like a prince.'

'Oh! you are jesting. Before I started I took good care to give all necessary orders so that you might lack nothing. But all the same I was absent and unable to watch; and you cannot imagine how vexed I felt at the idea of abandoning you like that in our poor empty house.'

They had got into the carriage, and the conversation continued as they drove away. Luc fully reassured them at last by telling them that he had spent two very interesting days, of which he would give them full particulars later on. When they reached La Crêcherie, although the night was falling, Jordan looked eagerly around him, so delighted at returning to his wonted life that he gave vent to cries of joy. It seemed to him as if he were coming back after an absence of several

weeks. How could one find any pleasure in roaming, said he, when all human happiness lay in the little nook where one thought, where one worked, freed by habit of the cares of life? Whilst waiting for Sœurette to have the dinner served, Jordan washed himself in some warm water, and then insisted on taking Luc into his laboratory, for he himself was eager to return thither, saying with a light laugh that he should have no appetite for dinner if he did not first of all breathe the air of the room in which his life was spent.

The laboratory was a very large and lofty place, built of brick and iron, with broad bay-windows facing the greenery of the park. An immense table laden with apparatus was set in the centre, and all round the walls were appliances, machine tools, with models, rough drafts of plans, and electrical furnaces on a reduced scale in the corners. A system of cables and wires hanging overhead from end to end of the room brought the electrical motive force from the neighbouring shed and distributed it among the appliances, tools, and furnaces, in order that the necessary experiments might be made. And beside all this scientific severity was a warm and cosy retreat in front of one of the windows, a retreat with low bookcases and deep armchairs, the couch on which the brother dozed at appointed hours, and the little table at which the sister sat while watching over him or assisting him like a faithful secretary.

Jordan touched a switch, and the whole room became radiant with a rush of electric light.

'So here I am!' said he. 'Really now, I only feel all right when I'm at home. By the way, that misfortune which compelled me to absent myself happened just as I was becoming passionately interested in a new experiment—I shall have to begin it again. But, *mon Dieu!* how well I feel!'

He continued laughing; colour had come to his cheeks, and he showed far more animation than usual. Leaning back on the couch in the attitude he usually assumed when yielding to thought, he compelled Luc also to sit down.

'I say, my good friend,' he continued, 'we have plenty of time—have we not?—to talk of the matters which made me so desirous to see you that I ventured to summon you here. Besides, it is necessary that Sœurette should be present, for she is an excellent counsellor. So if you are agreeable we will wait till after dinner, we will have our chat at dessert. And meantime, how happy I feel at having you there in front

of me to tell you how I am getting on with my studies ! They don't progress very fast, but I work at them, and that's the great thing, you know. It's enough if one works two hours a day.'

Then, this usually taciturn man went on chatting, recounting his experiments, which as a rule he confided to nobody, excepting the trees of his park, as he sometimes jestingly exclaimed. An electrical furnace being already devised, he had at first simply sought how it might be practically employed for the smelting of iron ore. In Switzerland, where the motive power derived from the torrents enabled one to perform certain work inexpensively, he had inspected furnaces which melted aluminium under excellent conditions. Why should it not be possible to treat iron in the same way ? To solve the problem it was only necessary to apply the same principles to a given case. The blast-furnaces in use gave scarcely more than 1,600 degrees of heat,<sup>1</sup> whereas 2,000 were obtained with the electrical furnaces, a temperature which would produce immediate fusion of perfect regularity. And Jordan had without any difficulty planned such a furnace as he thought advisable, a simple cube of brickwork, some six feet long on each side, the bottom and crucible being of magnesia, the most refractory substance known. He had also calculated and determined the volume of the electrodes, two large cylinders of carbon, and his first real find consisted in discovering that he might borrow from them the carbon necessary to disoxygenate the ore, in such wise that the operation of smelting would be greatly simplified, for there would be but little slag. If the furnace were built, however, or at least roughed out, how was one to set it working and keep it working in a practical, constant manner, in accordance with industrial requirements ?

'There !' said he, pointing to a model in a corner of the laboratory. 'There is my electrical furnace. Doubtless it needs to be perfected ; it is defective in various respects, there are little difficulties which are not yet solved. Nevertheless, such as it is, it has given me some pigs of excellent cast iron, and I estimate that a battery of ten similar furnaces working for ten hours would do the work of three establishments like mine kept alight both by day and night. And what easy work it would be, without any cause for anxiety, work which

<sup>1</sup> It may be presumed that M. Zola means centigrade degrees.—*Trans.*



children might direct by simply turning on switches. But I must confess that my pigs cost me as much money as if they were silver ingots. And so the problem is plain enough: my furnace, so far, is only a laboratory toy, and will only exist with respect to industrial enterprise when I am able to feed it with an abundance of electricity at a sufficiently low cost to render the smelting of iron ore remunerative.'

Then he explained that for the last six months he had left his furnace on one side to devote himself entirely to studying the transport of electrical force. Might not economy already be realised by burning coal at the mouth of the pit it came from, and by transmitting electrical force by cables to the distant factories requiring it? That again was a problem which many scientists had been endeavouring to solve for several years, and unfortunately they all found themselves confronted by a considerable loss of force during transit.

'Some more experiments have just been made,' said Luc with an incredulous air. 'I really think that there is no means of preventing loss.'

Jordan smiled with that gentle obstinacy, that invincible faith which he brought into his investigations during the months and months which he at times expended over them before arriving at the slightest grain of truth.

'One must think nothing before one is quite certain,' said he. 'I have already secured some good results; and some day electrical force will be stored up, canalised, and directed hither and thither without any loss at all. If twenty years' searching is necessary, well I'll give twenty years. It's all very simple: one sets to work anew every morning, one begins afresh until one finds—whatever should I myself do if I did not begin again and again?'

He said this with such naïve grandeur that Luc felt moved as by a deed of heroism. And he looked at Jordan, so slight, so puny of build, ever in poor health, coughing, pain-racked under his scarves and shawls, in that vast laboratory littered with gigantic appliances, traversed by wires charged with lightning, and filled more and more each day by colossal labour—the labour of a little insignificant being who went to and fro, striving, battling to desperation, like an insect lost amidst the dust of the ground. Where was it that he found not only intellectual energy but also sufficient physical vigour to undertake and carry through so many mighty tasks, for the accomplishment of which the lives of several strong,

healthy men seemed to be necessary? He could hardly trot about, he could scarcely breathe, and yet he raised a very world with his little hands, weak though they were, like those of a sickly child.

However, Sœurte now made her appearance, and gaily exclaimed: 'What! aren't you coming to dinner? I shall lock up the laboratory, my dear Martial, if you won't be reasonable.'

The dining-room, like the *salon*—two rather small apartments as warm and as cosy as nests, in which one detected the watchful care of a woman's heart—overlooked a vast stretch of greenery, a panorama of meadows and ploughed fields spreading to the dim distant horizon of La Roumagne. But at that hour of night, although the weather was so mild, the curtains were drawn. Luc now again noticed what minute attentions the sister lavished on the brother. He, Martial, followed quite an intricate regimen, having his special dishes, his special bread, and even his special water, which was slightly warmed in order to 'take the chill off it.' He ate like a bird, rose and went to bed early, like the chickens, who are sensible creatures; then during the day came short walks and rests between the hours that he gave to work. To those who expressed astonishment at the prodigious amount of work that he accomplished, and who thought him a terrible labourer, toiling from morning till night and showing himself no mercy, he replied that he worked scarcely three hours a day, two in the morning and one in the afternoon. And even in the morning a spell of recreation came between the two hours that he gave to work; for he could not fix his attention upon a subject for more than one hour at a stretch without experiencing vertigo, without feeling as if his brain were emptying. Never had he been able to toil for a longer time, and his value rested solely in his will-power, his tenacity, the passion that he imported into the work which he undertook, and with which he persevered, on and on, in all intellectual bravery, even if years went by before he brought it to a head.

Luc now at last discovered an answer to that question which he had so often asked himself: wherever did Jordan, who was so slight and weak, find the strength requisite for his mighty tasks? He found it solely in method, in the careful, well-reasoned employment of all his means, however slight they might be. He even made use of his weakness,

using it as a weapon which prevented him from being disturbed by outsiders. But above all else, he was ever intent on one and the same thing, the work he had in hand. To that work he gave every minute at his disposal, without ever yielding to discouragement or lassitude, but sustained by the unfailing desperate faith which raises mountains. Is it known what a mass of work one may pile up when one works only two hours a day on some useful and decisive task, which is never interrupted by idleness or fancy? Such work is like the grain of wheat which, accumulating, fills the sack, or like the ever-falling drop of water which causes the river to overflow. Stone by stone, the edifice rises, the monument grows, until it o'ertops the mountains. And it was thus, by a prodigy of method and personal adaptation, that this sickly little man, wrapped in rugs and drinking his water warm for fear lest he should catch cold, accomplished work of the mightiest kind, and this although he gave to it only the few hours of intellectual health that he succeeded in wresting from his physical weakness.

The dinner proved a very friendly and cheerful repast. The household service was entirely in the hands of women, for Sœurette found men too noisy and rough for her brother. The coachman and groom simply procured assistants on certain occasions when some very heavy work had to be done. And the servant-girls, all carefully selected, pleasant-looking, gentle and skilful, contributed to the happy quiescence of that cosy dwelling, where only a few intimates were received. That evening, for the return of the master and mistress, the dinner consisted of some clear soup, a barbel from the Mionne with melted butter, a roast fowl and some salad—all very simple dishes.

'So you have really not felt over-bored since Saturday?' Sœurette inquired of Luc when they were all three seated at the table.

'No, I assure you,' the young man answered, 'And besides, you have no notion how fully my time has been occupied.'

Then he first of all recounted his Saturday evening, the covert state of rebellion in which he had found Beauclair, the theft of a loaf by Nanet, the arrest of Lange, and his visit to Bonnaire, the victim of the strike. But by a strange scruple, at which he afterwards felt astonished, he virtually skipped his meeting with Josine, and did not mention her by name.

'Poor folks!' exclaimed Scourrette compassionately. 'That frightful strike reduced them to bread and water, and even those who had bread were lucky. What can one do? How can one help them? Alms give but the slightest relief, and you don't know how distressed I have been during the last two months, at feeling that we, the rich and happy, are so utterly powerless.'

She was a humanitarian, a pupil of her grandfather Dr. Michon, the old Fourierist and Saint-Simonian, who when she was quite little had taken her on his knees to tell her some fine stories of his own invention, stories of phalansteries established on blissful islands, of cities where men had found the fulfilment of all their dreams of happiness amidst eternal springtide.

'What can be done? What can be done?' she repeated dolorously, with her beautiful, soft, compassionate eyes fixed upon Luc. 'Something ought to be done, surely.'

Then Luc, emotion gaining on him, raised a heartfelt cry. 'Ah! yes, it's high time, one must act.'

But Jordan wagged his head; he, immersed in the cloistered life of a scientist, never occupied himself with politics. He held them in contempt, and unjustly—for after all it is necessary that men should watch over the manner in which they are governed. He, however, living amidst the absolute, regarded passing events, the accidents of the day, as mere jolts on the road, and consequently of no account. According to him it was science alone which led mankind to truth, justice, and final happiness, that perfect city of the future towards which the nations plod on so slowly, and with so much anguish. Of what use, therefore, was it to worry about all the rest? Was it not sufficient that science should advance? For it advanced in spite of everything—each of its conquests was definitive. And whatever might be the catastrophes of the journey, at the end there rose the victory of life, the accomplishment of the destiny of mankind. Thus, though he was very gentle and tender-hearted like his sister, he closed his ears to the contemporary battle, and shut himself up in his laboratory, where, as he expressed it, he manufactured happiness for to-morrow.

'Act?' he declared in his turn. 'Thought is an act, and the most fruitful of all acts in influence upon the world. Do we even know what seeds are germinating now? The sufferings of all those poor wretches are very distressing, but

I do not allow myself to be disturbed by them, for the harvest will come in its due season.'

Luc, feverish and disturbed as he himself felt, did not insist on the point, but went on to relate how he had spent his Sunday, his invitation to La Guerdache, the lunch there, the people he had met at table, and what had been done and what had been said. But whilst he spoke he could see that the brother and sister were becoming cold, as if they took no interest in all those folks.

'We seldom see the Boisgelins now that they are living at Beauclair,' Jordan exclaimed, with his quiet frankness. 'They showed themselves very amiable in Paris, but here we lead such a retired life that all intercourse has gradually ceased. Besides, it must be acknowledged that our ideas and our habits are very different from theirs. As for Delaveau, he is an intelligent and active fellow, absorbed in his business as I am in mine. And I must add that the fine society of Beauclair terrifies me to such a point that I keep my door closed to it, delighted at its indignation and at remaining alone like some dangerous madman.'

Sœurette began to laugh. 'Martial exaggerates a little,' said she. 'I receive Abbé Marle, who is a worthy man, as well as Doctor Novarre and Hermeline the schoolmaster, whose conversation interests me. And if it is true that we remain simply on a footing of courtesy with La Guerdache, I none the less retain sincere friendship for Madame Boisgelin, who is so good, so charming.'

Jordan, who liked to tease his sister at times, thereupon exclaimed: 'Why don't you say at once that it is I who compel you to flee the world, and that if I were not here you would throw the doors wide open!'

'Why, of course!' she answered gaily, 'the house is such as you desire it to be. But if you wish it I am quite willing to give a great ball, and invite Sub-Prefect Châtelard, Mayor Gourier, Judge Gaume, Captain Jollivet, and the Mazelles and the Boisgelins and the Delaveaus. You shall open the ball with Madame Mazelle!'

They went on jesting, for they felt very happy that evening, both on account of their return to their nest and of Luc's presence beside them. At last, when the dessert was served, they proceeded to deal with the great question. The two silent servant-girls had gone off in their light felt slippers, which rendered their footsteps inaudible; and the quiet

dining-room seemed full of the charm of affectionate intimacy, when hearts and minds can be opened in all freedom.

'So this, my friend,' said Jordan, 'is what I ask of your friendship. I wish you to study the question, and tell me what you yourself would do if you were in my place.'

He recapitulated the whole business, and explained how he himself regarded it. He would long since have rid himself of the blast-furnace if it had not, so to say, continued working of its own accord in the jog-trot manner regulated by routine. The profits remained sufficient, but holding himself to be rich enough he did not take them into account. And on the other hand, had he been minded to increase them, double or treble them as ambition might dictate, it would have been necessary to renew a part of the plant, improve the systems employed, and in a word devote oneself to them entirely. That was a thing which he could not and would not do, the more particularly as those ancient blast-furnaces, whose methods to him seemed so childish and barbarous, possessed no interest for him, and could be of no help in the experiments of electrical smelting in which he was now passionately absorbed. So he let the furnace go, occupied himself with it as little as possible, whilst awaiting an opportunity to get rid of it altogether.

'You understand, my friend, don't you?' he said to Luc. 'And now, you see, all at once old Laroche dies, and the whole management and all its worries fall on my shoulders again. You can't imagine what a lot of things ought to be done—a man's lifetime would scarcely suffice if one wished to deal with the matter seriously. For my part nothing in the world would induce me to relinquish my studies, my investigations. The best course, therefore, is to sell, and I am virtually ready to do so; still, first of all, I should much like to have your opinion.'

Luc understood Jordan's views, and thought them reasonable.

'No doubt,' he answered, 'you cannot change your work and habits, your whole life. You yourself and the world would both lose too much by it. But at the same time I think you might give the matter a little more thought, for perhaps there are other solutions possible. Besides, in order to sell you must find a purchaser.'

'Oh! I have a purchaser,' Jordan resumed. 'Delaveau has long desired to annex the blast-furnace of La Crêcherie

to the steel-works of the Abyss. He has sounded me already, and I have only to make a sign.'

Luc had started on hearing Delaveau's name, for he now at last understood why the latter had shown himself so anxious and so pressing in his inquiries. And as his host, who had noticed his gesture, inquired if he had anything to say against the manager of the Abyss, he responded, 'No, no, I think as you yourself do, that he is an active and intelligent man.'

'That is the very point,' continued Jordan; 'the business would be in the hands of an expert. It would be necessary, I think, to come to certain arrangements, such as agreeing to payments at long intervals, for Boisgelin has no capital at liberty. But that doesn't matter. I can wait, a guarantee on the Abyss would suffice me.' Then looking Luc full in the face, he concluded: 'Come, do you advise me to finish with the matter, and treat with Delaveau?'

The young man did not immediately reply. A feeling of uneasiness and repugnance was rising within him. What could it be? Why should he experience such indignation, such anger with himself, as if, by advising his friend to hand the blast-furnace over to that man Delaveau, he would be committing some bad action which would for ever leave him full of remorse? He could find no good reason for advising any other course. Thus he at last replied: 'All that you have said to me is certainly very reasonable, and I cannot do otherwise than approve of your views. And yet you might do well in giving the matter a little more thought.'

Sœurette had hitherto listened very attentively, without intervening. She seemed to share Luc's covert uneasiness, and now and again glanced at him anxiously, whilst waiting for his decision.

'The smeltery is not alone in question,' she at last exclaimed; 'there is also the mine, all that rocky land which cannot be separated from the furnace, so it seems to me.'

But her brother, eager to get rid of the whole affair, made an impatient gesture, saying: 'Delaveau shall take the land as well, if he desires it. What can we do with it? A mass of peeling calcined rock, amongst which the very nettles refuse to grow! It has no value whatever nowadays, since the mine can no longer be worked.'

'Is it quite certain that it can no longer be worked?' insisted Sœurette. 'I remember, Monsieur Froment, that you told us one evening in Paris that the ironmasters in Eastern France

had managed to make use of most defective ore by subjecting it to some chemical treatment. Why has that process never been tried here ?'

Jordan raised his arms towards the ceiling in a fit of despair. 'Why ? why, my dear ?' he cried. 'Because Laroche was deficient in all initiative ; because I myself have never had time to attend to the matter ; because things worked in a certain way and could not be got to work otherwise. If I'm selling the property it's precisely because I don't want to hear it mentioned again, for it is radically impossible for me to direct the business, and the mere thought of it makes me ill.'

He had risen, and his sister seeing him so agitated, remained silent for fear lest in provoking a dispute she might throw him into a fever.

'There are moments,' he continued, 'when I think of sending for Delaveau so that he may take everything whether he pays or not. I am not hard up for money. It's like those electrical furnaces which so greatly impassion me ; I have never once thought of employing them myself and of coining money with them, for as soon as I solve all the difficulties in my way, I shall give my invention to everybody, so as to help on universal prosperity and happiness. . . . Well then, it is understood. As our friend considers my plan to be a reasonable one, we will study the conditions of sale together to-morrow, and then I'll finish everything.'

Luc made no response ; a feeling of repugnance still possessed him, and he did not wish to pledge himself too far. But Jordan became yet more excited, and ended by suggesting that they should go up to see the furnace, the more especially as he wished to ascertain how things had gone there during his three days' absence.

'I am not without anxiety,' said he. 'Although Laroche has been dead a week I have not replaced him—I have let my master-smelter, Morfain, direct the work. He is a capital fellow ! He was born up yonder, and grew up amidst the fires ! Nevertheless the responsibility is heavy for a mere workman such as he is.'

Scœurette, alarmed by her brother's suggestion, intervened entreatingly. 'Oh, Martial !' she cried, 'you have only just come back from a long journey, and yet, tired as you must be, you want to go out again at ten o'clock at night.'

Jordan thereupon became very gentle again, and kissed her. 'Don't worry, little one,' said he ; 'you know that I never



attempt more than I feel I can do. I assure you that I shall sleep the better after making certain that things are all right. It is not a cold night, and, besides, I will put on my fur coat.'

Scurette herself fastened a thick scarf about his neck, and accompanied him and Luc down the steps in order to make sure that the night was really mild. It was indeed a delightful one, the trees, the rivulets, and the fields all slumbered beneath the heavens, which spread out like a canopy of dark velvet spangled with stars.

'I am confiding him to your care, Monsieur Froment,' said Scurette, referring to her brother. 'Do not let him remain out late.'

The two men at once began to climb a narrow stairway which was cut out in the rocks behind the house, and ascended to the stony landing whereon the furnace stood, halfway up the huge ridge of the Bleuse Mountains. It was a labyrinthine stairway of infinite charm, winding between pines and climbing plants. At each bend, on raising one's head, one perceived the black pile of the smeltery standing forth more and more plainly against the blue night-sky, the strange silhouettes of various mechanical adjuncts showing forth fantastically around the central pile.

Jordan went up the first with light short steps, and as he was at last reaching the landing he paused before a pile of rocks among which a little light gleamed like a star.

'Wait a minute,' he said, 'I want to make sure whether Morfain is at home or not.'

'Where, at home?' asked Luc in astonishment.

'Why here, in these old grottoes, which he has turned into a kind of dwelling-place, to which he clings most obstinately with his son and daughter, in spite of all the offers that I have made of providing him with a little house.'

All along the gorge of Brias quite a number of poor people dwelt in similar cavities. Morfain for his part remained there from taste, for there forty years previously he had first seen the light; and, moreover, he was thus close beside his work, that furnace which was at once his life, his prison, and his empire. Moreover, if he had chosen a prehistoric dwelling, he had behaved like a civilised man of the caves, closing both sides of his grotto with a substantial wall and providing a stout door and some windows fitted with little panes of glass. Inside, there were three rooms, the bedroom shared by the father and the son, the daughter's

bedroom, and the common room, which served at once as kitchen, dining-room, and workshop. And all three chambers were very clean, with their walls and their vaulted roof of stone, and their substantial, if roughly hewn, furniture.

As Jordan had said, the Morfains from father to son had been master-smelters at La Cr  cherie. The grandfather had helped to found the establishment, and after an uninterrupted family reign of more than eighty years the grandson now kept watch over the tappings. Like some indisputable title of nobility the hereditary character of his calling filled Morfain with pride. His wife had now been dead four years, leaving him a son then sixteen, and a daughter then fourteen years of age. The lad had immediately begun to work at the furnace, and the girl had taken care of the two men, cooking their meals, sweeping and cleaning the dwelling-place like a good housewife. In this wise had the days gone by; the girl was now eighteen and the lad twenty, and the father quietly watched his race continuing pending the time when he might hand over the furnace to his son, even as his father had transmitted it to him.

'Ah! so you are here, Morfain,' said Jordan, when he had pushed open the door, which was merely closed by a latch. 'I have just returned home, and I wanted to know how things were getting on.'

Within the rocky cavity, lighted by a small and smoky lamp, the father and son sat at table eating some soup—a mess of broth and vegetables—before starting on their night's work, whilst the daughter stood in the rear, serving them. And their huge shadows seemed to fill the place, which was very solemn and silent. At last in a gruff voice Morfain slowly answered, 'We've had a bad business, Monsieur Jordan, but I hope that things will be quiet now.'

He rose to his feet, as did his son, and stood there between the lad and the girl, all three of them strongly built and of such lofty stature that their heads almost touched the rough smoky stone vault, which served as a ceiling to the room. One might have taken them for three apparitions of the vanished ages, some family of mighty toilers whose long efforts throughout the centuries had subjugated nature.

Luc gazed with amazement at Morfain, a veritable colossus, one of the Vulcans of old by whom fire was first conquered. He had an enormous head, with a broad face, ravined and scorched by the flames. His brow was a bossy

one, his eyes glowed like live coals, his nose showed like an eagle's beak between his cheeks, which looked as if they had been ravaged by some flow of lava. And his swollen, twisted mouth was of a tawny redness like that of a burn; while his hands had the colour and the strength of pincers of old steel.

Then Luc glanced at the son, *Petit-Da*,<sup>1</sup> as he was called, this nickname having been given him because in childhood he had been accustomed to pronounce certain words badly, and, further, had one day narrowly missed losing his little fingers in some 'pig' which was scarcely cold. He again was a colossus, almost as huge as his father, whose square face, imperious nose, and flaming eyes he had inherited. But he had been less hardened, less marked by fire; and, besides, he could read, and his features were softened and brightened by dawning powers of thought.

Finally Luc gazed at the daughter, *Ma-Bleue*, as her father had ever lovingly called her, so blue indeed were her great eyes, the eyes of a fair-haired goddess, lightly and infinitely blue, and so large that in all her face one was conscious of nothing else save that celestial blueness. She was a goddess of lofty stature, of simple yet magnificent comeliness, the most beautiful, the most taciturn, the wildest creature of the region, yet one who in her wildness dreamt, read books, and saw from afar off the approach of things that her father had never seen, and the unconfessed expectation of which made her quiver. Luc marvelled at the sight of those three creatures of heroic build, that family in which he detected all the long overpowering labour of mankind on its onward march, all the pride begotten of painful effort incessantly renewed, all the ancient nobility that springs from deadly toil.

But Jordan had become anxious. 'A bad business, *Morfain*!' said he, 'how was that?'

'Yes, *Monsieur Jordan*, one of the *twyers* got stopped up. For two days I fancied that we were going to have a misfortune, and I didn't sleep for thought of it. It grieved me so much that a thing like that should happen to me just when you were away. It's best to go and see if you've the time. We shall be "running" by-and-by.'

The two men finished their soup standing, hastily swallowing large spoonfuls of it whilst the girl already began

<sup>1</sup> The meaning is 'Little Dolt,' 'Da' being a contraction of 'Dadais.'—*Trans.*

to wipe the table. They rarely spoke together, a gesture or a glance sufficed for them to understand each other. Nevertheless the father, affectionately softening his gruff voice, said to Ma-Bleue: 'You can put out the light, you need not wait for us, we shall have a rest up above.'

Then whilst Morfain and Petit-Da went off in front, accompanying Jordan, Luc, who was in the rear, glanced round, and on the threshold of that barbarian home he perceived Ma-Bleue, standing erect, tall and superb, like some *amorosa* of the ancient days, whilst her large azure eyes wandered dreamily far away into the clear night.

The black pile of the furnace soon arose before the young man's view. It was of a very ancient pattern, heavy and squat, not more than fifty feet in height. But by degrees various improvements had been added, new organs, as it were, which had ended by forming a little village around it. The running hall, floored with fine sand, looked light and elegant with its iron framework roofed with tiles. Then on the left, inside a large glazed shed, was the blast apparatus with its steam engine; whilst on the right rose the two groups of lofty cylinders, those in which the combustible gases became purified, and those in which they served to warm the blast from the engine, in order that it might reach the furnace burning hot, and in this wise hasten combustion. And there were also a number of water-tanks and a whole system of piping, which kept moisture ever trickling down the sides of the brick walls in order to cool them and diminish the wear and tear of the awful fire raging within. Thus the monster virtually disappeared beneath the intricate medley of its adjuncts, a conglomeration of buildings, a bristling of iron tanks, an entanglement of big metal pipes, the whole forming an extraordinary jumble which, at night-time especially, displayed the most barbarous, fantastic silhouettes. Above, beside the rock one perceived the bridge which brought the trucks laden with ore and fuel to the level of the mouth of the furnace. Below, the kieve reared its black cone, and then from the belly downward a powerful metal armature sustained the brickwork which supported the water conduits and the four twyers. Finally, at the bottom there was but the crucible, with its taphole closed with a bung of refractory clay. But what a gigantic beast the whole made, a beast of disquieting, bewildering shape, which devoured stones and gave out metal in fusion.

Moreover, was there scarcely a sound, scarcely a light. That mighty digestion apparently preferred silence and gloom. One could only hear the faint trickling of the water running down the sides of the bricks, and the ceaseless distant rumbling of the blast apparatus in the engine-shed. And the only lights were those of three or four lanterns gleaming amidst the darkness, which the shadows of the huge buildings rendered the more dense. Moreover, only a few pale figures were seen flitting about, the eight smelters of the night-shift, who wandered hither and thither whilst waiting for the next 'run.' On the platform of the mouth of the furnace up above one could not even discern the men who, silently obeying the signals sent them from below, poured into the furnace the requisite charges of ore and fuel. And there was not a cry, not a flash of light; it was all dim, mute labour, something mighty and savage accomplished in the gloom.

Jordan, however, moved by the bad news given him, had reverted to his dream; and pointing to the pile of buildings, he said to Luc, who had now joined him: 'You see it, my friend; now am I not right in wishing to do away with all that, in wishing to replace such a cumbersome monster, which entails such painful toil, by my battery of electrical furnaces, which would be so clean, so simple, so easily managed? Since the day when the first men dug a hole in the ground to melt ore by mingling it with branches which they set alight, there has really been little change in the methods employed. They are still childish and primitive. Our blast-furnaces are mere adaptations of the prehistoric pits, changed into hollow columns and enlarged according to requirements. And one continues throwing in the ore and the combustible pell mell, and burning them together. One might take such a furnace to be some infernal animal, down whose throat one is for ever pouring food compounded of coal and oxide of iron, which the beast digests amidst a hurricane of fire, and which it gives out down below in the form of fused metal, whilst the gases, the dust, the slag of every kind goes off elsewhere. And observe that the whole operation rests in the slow descent of the digested substances, in total absolute digestion, for the object of all the improvements hitherto effected has been to facilitate it. Formerly there was no blast, no blowing apparatus, and fusion was therefore slower and more defective. Then cold air was employed, and next it was perceived that a better result was obtained by heating

the air. At last came the idea of heating that air by borrowing from the furnace itself the gases which had formerly burnt at its mouth in a plume of flames. And in this wise many external organs have been added to our blast-furnaces, but in spite of every improvement, in spite of their huge proportions, they have remained childish, and have even grown more and more delicate, liable to frequent accidents. Ah! you can't imagine the illnesses which fall upon such a monster. There is no puny, sickly little child in the whole world whose daily digestion gives as much anxiety to his parents as a monster like this gives to those in charge of it. Day and night incessantly two shifts, each of six loaders up above and eight smelters down below, with foremen, an engineer, and so forth, are on the spot, busy with the food supplied to the beast, and the output it yields; and at the slightest disturbance, if the metal run out should not be satisfactory, everybody is in a state of alarm. For five years now this furnace has been alight; never for a single minute has the internal fire ceased to perform its work; and it may burn another five years in the same way before it is extinguished to allow of repairs being made. And if those in charge tremble and watch so carefully over the work, it is because there is the everlasting possibility that the fire may go out of itself, through some accident of unforeseen gravity in the monster's bowels. And to go out, to become extinguished, means death. Ah! those little electrical furnaces of mine, which lads might work, they won't disturb anybody's rest at nights, and they will be so healthy, and so active and so docile!

Luc could not help laughing, amused by the loving passion which entered into Jordan's scientific researches. However, they had now been joined by Morfain and Petit-Da, and the former, under the pale gleam of a lantern, pointed to one of the four pipes which, at a height of nine or ten feet, penetrated the monster's flanks.

'There! it was that twyer which got stopped up, Monsieur Jordan,' he said, 'and unfortunately I had gone home to bed, so that I only noticed what was the matter the next day. As the blast did not penetrate a chill occurred, and a quantity of matter got together and hardened. Nothing more went down, but I only became aware of the trouble at the moment of tapping, on seeing the slag come out in a thick pulp which was already black. And you can under-

stand my fright ; for I remembered our misfortune ten years ago, when one had to demolish a part of the furnace after a similar occurrence.'

Never before had Morfain spoken so many words at a stretch. His voice trembled as he recalled the former accident, for no more terrible illness can fall on the monster than one of those chills which solidify the ore and convert it into so much rock. The result is deadly when one is unable to relight the brasier. By degrees the whole mass becomes chilled and adheres to the furnace ; and then there is nothing else to be done but to demolish the pile, raze it to the ground, like some old tower chokeful of stones.

'And what did you do ?' Jordan inquired.

Morfain did not immediately answer. He had ended by loving that monster whose flow of glowing lava had scorched his face for more than thirty years. It was like a giant, a master, a god of fire which he adored, bending beneath the rude tyranny of the worship that had been forced upon him the moment he reached man's estate as his sole means of procuring daily bread. He scarcely knew how to read, he had not been touched by the new spirit which was abroad, he experienced no feelings of rebellion, but cheerfully accepted his life of hard servitude, vain of his strong arms, his hourly battles with the flames, his fidelity to that crouching colossus over whose digestion he watched without ever a thought of going out on strike. And his barbarous and terrible god had become his passion ; his faith in that divinity was instinct with secret tenderness, and he still quivered with anxiety at the thought of the dangerous attack from which he had saved his idol, thanks to extraordinary efforts of devotion.

'What I did !' he at last responded. 'Well, I began by trebling the charges of coal, and then I tried to clear the twyer by working the blast apparatus as I had sometimes seen Monsieur Laroche do. But the attack was already too serious, and we had to disjoint the twyer and attack the stoppage with bars. Ah ! it wasn't an easy job, and we lost some of our strength in doing it. All the same, we at last got the air to pass, and I was better pleased when, among the slag this morning, I found some remnants of ore, for I realised that the matter which had sêd had got broken up again and carried away. Everything is once more well alight now, and we shall be doing good work again. Besides

it will soon be easy to see how things are ; the next run will tell us.'

Although he was well-nigh exhausted by such a long discourse, he added in a lower voice : ' I really believe, Monsieur Jordan, that I should have gone up above and flung myself into the mouth if I had not had better news to give you this evening. I'm only a workman, a smelter, in whom you've had confidence, giving me a gentleman's post, an engineer's post. And just fancy me letting the furnace go out and telling you on your return home that it was dead ! Ah ! no, indeed, I'd have died too ! I haven't been to bed for two nights now ; I've kept watch here, like I did beside my poor wife when I lost her. And at present, I may admit it, the soup which you found me eating was the first food I had tasted for forty-eight hours, for I couldn't eat before, my own stomach seemed to be stopped up like the furnace's. I don't want to apologise, but simply to let you know how happy I feel at not having failed in the confidence you put in me.'

That big fellow, hardened by perpetual fire, whose limbs were like steel, almost wept as he spoke those words, and Jordan pressed his hands affectionately, saying : ' I know how valiant you are, my good Morfain ; I know that if a disaster had happened you would have fought on to the very end.'

Meantime Petit-Da had stood listening in the gloom, intervening neither by word nor gesture. He only moved when his father gave him an order respecting the tapping. Every four-and-twenty hours the metal was run out five times, at intervals of nearly five hours. The charge, which might be eighty tons a day, was at that moment reduced to about fifty, which would give runs of ten tons each. By the faint light of the lanterns the needful arrangements were made in silence ; channels and panels for casting were prepared in the fine sand of the large hall ; and then before running out the metal the only thing remaining to be done was to get rid of the slag. Thus the shadowy forms of workmen were seen passing slowly, busily engaged in operations which could be only dimly distinguished, whilst amidst the heavy silence which prevailed within the squatting idol, one still heard nothing save the trickling of the drops of water which were coursing down its sides.

' Monsieur Jordan,' Morfain inquired, ' would you like to see the slag run out ? '

Jordan and Luc followed him, and a few steps brought



them to a hillock formed of an accumulation of waste. The aperture was on the right-hand side of the furnace, and the slag was already pouring out in a flood of sparkling dross, as if the cauldron of fusing metal were being skimmed. The matter was like thick pulp, sun-hued lava, flowing slowly along and falling into waggonets of sheet iron, where it at once became dim.

'The colour's good, you see, Monsieur Jordan,' resumed Morfain gaily. 'Oh! we are out of trouble, that's sure. You'll see, you'll see.'

Then he brought them back to the running-hall in front of the furnace, whose vague dimness was so faintly illumined by the lanterns. Petit-Da, with one lunge of his strong young arms, had just thrust a bar into the bung of refractory clay which closed the tap-hole, and now the eight men of the night shift were rhythmically ramming the bar in further. Their black figures could scarcely be discerned, and one only heard the dull blows of the rammer. Then, all at once, a dazzling star, as it were, appeared, a small peep-hole through which showed the inner fire. But as yet there was only a faint trickling of the liquid metal, and Petit-Da had to take another bar, thrust it in, and turn it round and round with herculean efforts in order to enlarge the aperture. Then came the *débâcle*, the flood rushed out tumultuously, a river of fusing metal rolled along the channel in the sand, and then spread out, filling the moulds, and forming blazing pools, whose glow and heat quite scorched the eyes of the beholders. And from that channel and those sheets of fire rose a crop of sparks, blue sparks, of delicate ethereality, and fusees of gold, delightfully refined, a florescence of cornflowers, as it were, amidst a growth of wheat-ears. Whenever any obstacle of damp sand was encountered both the sparks and the fusees increased in number, and rose to a great height in a bouquet of splendour. And all at once, as if some miraculous sun had risen, an intense dawn burst over everything, casting a great glare upon the furnace, and throwing a glow as of sunshine upward to the roof of the hall, whose every girder and joist showed forth distinctly. The neighbouring buildings, the monster's various organs, sprang out of the darkness, together with the men of the night-shift, hitherto so phantom-like and now so real, outlined with an energy and splendour never to be forgotten, as if, obscure heroes of toil that they were, they suddenly found themselves enveloped by a nimbus of glory.

And the great glow spread to all the surroundings, conjured the huge ridge of the Bleuse Mountains out of the darkness, threw reflections even upon the sleeping roofs of Beauchair, and died away at last in the distance far over the great plain of La Roumagne.

'It is superb,' said Jordan, studying the quality of the metal by the colour and limpidity of the flow.

Morfain took his triumph modestly. 'Yes, yes, Monsieur Jordan,' said he, 'it's good work, such as we ought to turn out. All the same, I'm glad you came to have a look. You won't feel anxious now.'

Luc also was taking an interest in the proceedings. So great was the heat that he felt his skin tingling through his clothes. Little by little all the moulds had been filled, and the sandy hall was now changed into an incandescent sea. And when the ten tons of liquid metal had all poured forth, a final tempest, a huge rush of flames and sparks, came from the cavity. The blowing-apparatus was emptying the crucible, the blast sweeping through it in all freedom like some hurricane of hell. But the pigs were now growing cold, their blinding white light became pink, next red, and then brown. The sparks, too, ceased to rise, the field of azure cornflowers and golden wheat-ears was reaped. Then gloom swiftly fell once more, blotting out the hall and the furnace and all the adjoining buildings, whilst it seemed as if the lanterns had been lighted up afresh. And of the workmen one could again only distinguish some vague figures actively bestirring themselves—they were those of Petit-Da and two of his mates, who were again plugging the tap-hole with refractory clay, amidst the silence which was now deeper than ever, for the blast machinery had been stopped to permit of this work being performed.

'I say, Morfain, my good fellow,' Jordan suddenly resumed, 'you will go home to bed, won't you?'

'Oh! no, I must spend the night here,' the man answered.

'What! you mean to stay, and pass a third sleepless night here?'

'Oh! there's a camp bedstead in the watch-house, Monsieur Jordan, and one sleeps very well on it. We'll relieve each other, my son and I; we'll each do two hours' sentry duty in turn.'

'But that's useless, since things are now all right again,' Jordan retorted. 'Come, be reasonable, Morfain, and go and sleep at home.'

'No, no, Monsieur Jordan, let me do as I wish. There's no more danger, but I want to make sure how things go until to-morrow. It will please me to do so.'

Thus Jordan and Luc, after shaking hands with him, had to leave him there. And Luc felt extremely moved, for Morfain had left on him an impression of great loftiness in which met long years of painful and docile labour, all the nobility of the crushing toil which mankind had undertaken in the hope of attaining to rest and happiness. It had all begun with the ancient Vulcans, who had subjugated fire in those heroic times which Jordan had recalled, when the first smelters had reduced their ore in a pit dug in the earth, in which they lighted wood. It was on that day, the day when man first conquered iron and fashioned it, that he became the master of the world, and that the era of civilisation first began. Morfain, dwelling in his rocky cave, and for whom nothing existed apart from the difficulties and the glory of his calling, seemed to Luc like some direct descendant of those primitive toilers, whose far-off characteristics still lived by force of heredity in him, silent and resigned as he was, giving all the strength of his muscles without ever a murmur, even as his predecessors had done at the dawn of human society. Ah! how much perspiration had streamed forth and how many arms had toiled to the point of exhaustion during thousands and thousands of years! And yet nothing changed—fire, if conquered, still made its victims, still had its slaves, those who fed it, those who scorched their blood in subjugating it, whilst the privileged ones of the earth lived in idleness, in homes which were fresh and cool! Morfain, like some legendary hero, did not seem even to suspect the existence of all the monstrous iniquity around him; he was ignorant of rebellion, of the storm growling afar; he remained quite impassive at his deadly post, there where his sires had died and where he himself would die. And Luc also conjured up another figure, that of Bonnaire, another hero of labour, one who struggled against the oppressors, the exploiters, in order that justice might at last reign; and who devoted himself to his comrades' cause even to the point of giving up his daily bread. Had not all those suffering men groaned long enough beneath their burdens, and, however admirable might be their toil, had not the hour struck for the deliverance of the slaves in order that they might at last become free citizens in a fraternal community, amidst which peace would spring from a just apportionment of labour and wealth?

However, as Jordan, whilst descending the steps out in the rock, stopped before a night-watchman's hut to give an order, an unexpected sight met Luc's eyes and brought his emotion to a climax. Behind some bushes, amidst some scattered rocks, he distinctly saw two shadowy forms passing. Their arms encircled each other's waist and their lips were meeting in a kiss. Luc readily recognised the girl, so tall she was, so fair and so superb. She was none other than Ma-Bleue, the maid whose great blue eyes seemed to fill her face. And the lad must assuredly be Achille Gourier, the mayor's son, that proud and handsome youth whose demeanour he, Luc, had noticed at La Guerdache—that demeanour so expressive of contempt for the rotting *bourgeoisie* of which he was one of the revolting sons. Ever shooting, fishing, and roaming, he spent his holidays among the steep paths of the Bleuse Mountains, beside the torrents or deep in the pine woods. And doubtless he had fallen in love with that beautiful, shy, wild girl, around whom so many admirers prowled in vain. She, on her side, must have been conquered by the advent of that Prince Charming, who brought her something that was beyond her sphere, who set all the delightful dreams of to-morrow amidst the sternness of that desert. To-morrow! to-morrow! Was it not that which dawned in Ma-Bleue's blue eyes, when, with her gaze wandering far away, she stood so thoughtful on the threshold of her mountain cave? Her father and her brother were watching over their work up yonder, and she had escaped down the precipitous paths. And for her to-morrow meant that tall, loving lad, that *bourgeois* stripling, who spoke to her so prettily as if she had been a lady, and vowed that he would love her for ever.

At first, amidst his amazement, Luc felt a heart-pang at the thought of how grieved the father would be should he hear of that sweethearting. Then a tender feeling took possession of the young man's heart, a caressing breath of hope came to him at the sight of that free and gentle love. Were not those children, who belonged to such different classes, preparing amidst their play, their kisses, the advent of the happier morrow, the great reconciliation which would at last lead to the reign of justice?

Down below, when Luc and Jordan reached the park, they exchanged a few more words.

'You haven't caught cold, I hope?' said the young man to his friend. 'Your sister would never forgive me, you know.'

‘No, no, I feel quite well. And I am going to bed in the best of spirits, for I’ve quite made up my mind. I intend to rid myself of that enterprise, since it does not interest me, and proves such a constant source of worry.’

For a moment Luc remained silent, for uneasiness had returned to him, as if, indeed, he were frightened by Jordan’s decision. However, as he left his friend he said, shaking his hand for the last time, ‘No, wait, give me to-morrow to think the matter over. We will have another talk in the evening, and afterwards you shall come to a decision.’

Then they parted for the night. Luc did not go to bed immediately. He occupied—in the pavilion formerly erected for Dr. Michon, Jordan’s maternal grandfather—the spacious room where the doctor had spent his last years among his books; and during the three days that he had occupied this chamber the young man had grown fond of the pleasantness, peacefulness, and odour of work that filled it. That evening, however, the fever of doubt, by which he was possessed, oppressed him, and throwing one of the windows wide open he leant out, hoping in this wise to calm himself a little before he went to bed. The window overlooked the road leading from La Crêcherie to Beauclair. In front spread some uncultivated fields strewn with rocks, and beyond them one could distinguish the jumbled roofs of the sleeping town.

For a few minutes Luc remained inhaling the gusts of air which arose from the great plain of La Roumagne. The night was warm and moist, and athwart a slight haze a bluish light descended from the starry sky. Luc listened to the distant sounds with which the night quivered; and before long he recognised the dull, rhythmical blows of the hammers of the Abyss, that Cyclopean forge whence day and night alike there came a clang of steel. Then he raised his eyes and sought the black, silent smeltery of La Crêcherie, but it was now mingled with the inky bar which the promontory of the Bleuse Mountains set against the sky. Lowering his eyes he at last directed them upon the close-set roofs of the town, whose heavy slumber seemed to be cradled by the rhythmic blows of the hammers—those blows which suggested the quick and difficult breathing of some giant worker, some pain-racked Prometheus, chained to eternal toil. And Luc’s feeling of uneasiness was increased by it all; he could not quiet his fever; the people and the things that he had beheld during those last three days crowded upon his mind, passed before him in a tragic scramble, the sense of which he strove to

divine. And the problem which possessed his spirit now tortured him more than ever. Assuredly he would be unable to sleep until he found a means of solving it.

But down below his window, across the road, amongst the bushes and the rocks, he suddenly heard a fresh sound, something so light, so faint, that he could not tell what it might be. Was it the beating of a bird's wings, the rustle of an insect among some leaves? Luc gazed down, and could see nothing save the swelling darkness that spread far, far away. No doubt he had been mistaken. But the sounds reached his ears again, and even seemed to come nearer. Interested by them, seized with a strange emotion which astonished him, he again strove to penetrate the darkness, and at last he distinguished a vague, light, delicate form which seemed to float over the grass. And still he was unable to tell what that form might be, and was willing to believe himself the victim of some delusion, when, with a nimble spring like that of some wild goat, a woman crossed the road and lightly threw him a little nosegay, which brushed against his face like a caress. It was a little bunch of mountain pansies, just gathered among the rocks, and of such powerful aroma, that he was quite perfumed by it.

Josine!—he divined that it was she, he recognised her by that fresh sign of her heart's thankfulness, by that adorable gesture of infinite gratitude! And it all seemed to him exquisite in that dimness, at that late hour, though he could not tell how she had happened to be there, whether she had been watching for his return, and how she could have contrived to come, unless indeed Ragu were working at a night-shift. Without a word, having had no other desire than that of expressing her feelings by the gift of those flowers, which she had so lightly thrown him, she was already fleeing, disappearing into the darkness spread over the uncultivated moor; and only then did Luc distinguish another and a smaller form, that assuredly of Nanet, bounding along near her. They both vanished, and then he again heard nought save the hammers of the Abyss, ever rhythmically beating in the distance. His torment was not passed, but his heart had been warmed by a glow which seemed to bring him invincible strength. It was with rapture that he inhaled the little nosegay. Ah! the power of kindness, which is the bond of brotherhood, the power of tenderness, by which alone happiness is created, the power of love, which will save and make the world anew!

## V

Luc went to bed and put out the light, hoping that his weariness of mind and body would bring him sound and refreshing sleep, in which his fever would at last be dispelled. But when the large room sank into silence and obscurity around him he found himself quite unable to close his eyes—they stared into the darkness, and terrible insomnia kept him burning hot, still a prey to his one obstinate, all-consuming idea.

Josine was ever rising before him, coming back again and again with her childish face and doleful charm. He once more saw her in tears, standing, full of terror, as she waited near the gate of the Abyss; he again saw her standing in the wine-shop, then thrown into the street by Ragu in so brutal a fashion that blood gushed from her maimed hand; and he saw her too on the bench near the Mionne, forsaken amidst the tragic night, satisfying her hunger like some poor wandering animal, and having no prospect before her save a final tumble into the gutter. And now, after those three days of unexpected, almost unconscious inquiry, to which destiny had led him, all that he, Luc, had beheld of unjustly apportioned toil—toil derided as if it were shame, toil conducting to the most atrocious misery for the vast majority of mankind, became in his eyes synthetised in the distressing case of that sorry girl whose misfortunes wrung his heart.

Visions arose, thronging around him, pressing forward, haunting him to the point of torture. He beheld terror careering through the black streets of Beauclair, along which tramped all the disinherited wretches, secretly dreaming of vengeance. He saw reasoned, organised, and fatal revolution dawning in such homes as the Bonnaires' cold, bare, sorry rooms, where even the mere necessities of life were wanting, where lack of work compelled the toiler to tighten his waistband, and left the family starving. And, on the other hand, he beheld at La Guerdache all the insolence of corrupting luxury, all the poisonous enjoyment which was finishing off the privileged plutocrats, that handful of *bourgeois* satiated with idleness, gorged to stifling point with all the iniquitous wealth which they stole from the labour and the tears of the immense majority of the workers. And even at La Crêcherie, that wildly lofty blast-furnace, where not one worker complained,

the long efforts of mankind were stricken, so to say, by a curse, immobilised in eternal dolour, without hope of any complete freeing of the race, of its final deliverance from slavery, and the entry of one and all into the city of justice and peace. And Luc had seen and heard Beauclair cracking upon all sides, for the fratricidal warfare was not waged only between classes, its destructive ferment was perverting families, a blast of folly and hatred was sweeping by, filling every heart with bitterness. Monstrous dramas soiled homes that should have been cleanly, fathers, mothers, and children alike rolled into the sewers. Folk lied unceasingly, they stole, they killed. And at the end of wretchedness and hunger came crime perforce: woman selling herself, man sinking to drink, all human kind becoming a rageful beast that rushed along intent solely upon satisfying its vices. Many were the frightful signs that announced the inevitable catastrophe; the old social framework was about to topple down amidst blood and mire.

Horror-stricken by those visions of shame and chastisement, weeping with all the human tenderness within him, Luc then again saw the pale phantom of Josine returning from the depths of the darkness and stretching out arms of entreaty. And then, in his fancy, none but her remained; it was upon her that the worm-eaten, leprous edifice would fall. She became, as it were, the one victim, she, the puny little work-girl with the maimed hand, who was starving and who would roll into the gutter, a pitiable yet charming creature, in whom seemed to be embodied all the misery that arose from the accursed wage-system. He now suffered as she must suffer, and, above all else, in his wild dream of saving Beauclair there was a craving to save her. If some superhuman power had made him almighty he would have transformed that town, now rotted by egotism, into a happy abode of solidarity, in order that she might be happy. He realised at present that this dream of his was an old one, that it had always possessed him since the days when he had lived in one of the poor quarters of Paris, among the obscure heroes and the dolorous victims of labour. It was a dream into which entered secret disquietude respecting the future, that future which he dared not predict, and an idea that some mysterious mission had been confided to him. And all at once, amidst the confusion in which he still struggled, it seemed to him that the decisive hour had come. Josine was starving, Josine was



sobbing, and that could be allowed no longer. He must act, he must at once relieve all the misery and all the suffering, in order that things so iniquitous might cease.

Weary as he was, however, he at last fell into a doze, in the midst of which it seemed as if voices were calling him. Thus before long he awoke with a start, and then the voices seemed to gather strength, as if wildly summoning him to that urgent work for which the hour had struck, and the imperious need of which he fully recognised, though how to accomplish it he could not tell. And above all other appeals, he finally heard the call of a very gentle voice, which he recognised—the voice of Josine, lamenting and entreating. From that moment again she alone seemed to be present, he could feel the warm caress of the kiss which she had set upon his hand, and could smell the little bunch of pansies which she had thrown him as he stood at the window. Indeed, the wild fragrance of the flowers now seemed to fill the whole room. Then he struggled no longer. He lighted his candle, rose, and for a few minutes walked about the room. In order to rid his brain of the fixed idea which oppressed it he strove to think of nothing. He looked at the few old engravings hanging from the walls, he looked at the old-fashioned articles of furniture which spoke of Doctor Michon's simple and studious habits, he gazed around the whole room, in which a deal of kindness, good sense, and wisdom seemed to have lingered. At last his attention became riveted on the book-case. It was a rather large one, with glass doors, and therein the former Saint-Simonian and Fourierist had gathered together the humanitarian writings which had fired his mind in youth. All the social philosophers, all the precursors, all the apostles of the new Gospel figured there: Saint-Simon, Fourier, Auguste Comte, Proudhon, Cabet, Pierre Leroux, with others and others—indeed, a complete collection, down to the most obscure disciples. And Luc, candle in hand, read the names and titles on the backs of the volumes, counted them, and grew astonished at their number, at the fact that so much good seed should have been cast to the winds, that so many good words should be slumbering there, waiting for the harvest.

He himself had read widely, he was well acquainted with the chief passages of most of those books. The philosophical, economical, and social systems of their authors were familiar to him. But never as now, on finding these authors all united

there in a serried phalanx, had he been so clearly conscious of their force, their value, the human evolution which they typified. They formed, so to say, the advance guard of the future century, an advance guard soon to be followed by the huge army of the nations. And on seeing them thus, side by side, peaceably mingling together, endowed by union with sovereign strength, Luc was particularly struck by their intense brotherliness. He was not ignorant of the contradictory views which had formerly parted them, of the desperate battles even which they had waged together, but they now seemed to have become all brothers, reconciled in a common Gospel, in the unique and final truths which all of them had brought. And that which arose from their words like a dawning promise was that religion of humanity in which they had all believed, their love for the disinherited ones of the world, their hatred of all social injustice, their faith in Work as the true saviour of mankind.

Opening the bookcase, Luc wished to select one of the volumes. Since he was unable to sleep, he would read a few pages, and thus take patience until slumber should come to him. He hesitated for a moment, and at last selected a very little volume, in which one of Fourier's disciples had summed up the whole of his master's work. The title '*Solidarité*' had moved the young man. Would he not find in that book a few pages brimful of strength and hope such as he needed? Thus, he slipped into bed again, and began to read. And soon he became as passionately interested in his reading as if he had before him some poignant drama in which the fate of the whole human race was decided. The author's doctrines thus condensed, reduced to the very essence of the truths they contained, acquired extraordinary power. Fourier's genius had in the first place asserted itself in turning the passions of man into the very forces of life. The long and disastrous error of Catholicism had lain in ever seeking to muzzle the passions, in striving to kill the man within man, to fling him like a slave at the foot of a deity of tyranny and nothingness. In the free future society conceived by Fourier the passions were to produce as much good as they had produced evil in the chained and terrorised society of the dead centuries. They constituted immortal desire, the energy which raises worlds, the internal furnace of will and strength which imparts to each being the power to act. Man deprived of a single passion would be mutilated, as if he were deprived of

one of his senses. Instincts, hitherto thrust back and crushed, as if they were evil beasts, would when once they were freed become only the various needs of universal attraction, all tending towards unity, striving amidst obstacles to meet and mingle in final harmony, that ultimate expression of universal happiness. And there were really no egotists, no idlers; there were only men hungering for unity and harmony, who would march on in all brotherliness as soon as they should see that the road was wide enough for all to pass along it at ease and happily. As for the victims of the heavy servitude that oppressed the manual toilers who were angered by unjust, excessive, and often inappropriate tasks, they would all be ready to work right joyfully as soon as simply their logical chosen share of the great common labour should be allotted to them.

Then another stroke of genius on Fourier's part was the restoration of work to a position of honour, by making it the public function, the pride, health, gaiety, and very law of life. It would suffice to reorganise work in order to reorganise the whole of society, of which work would be the one civic obligation, the vital rule. There would be no further question of brutally imposing work on vanquished men, mercenaries crushed down and treated like famished beasts of burden; on the contrary, work would be freely accepted by all, allotted according to tastes and natures, performed during the few hours that might be indispensable, and constantly varied according to the choice of the voluntary toilers. A town would become an immense hive in which there would not be one idler, and in which each citizen would contribute his share towards the general sum of labour which might be necessary for the town to live. The tendency towards unity and final harmony would draw the inhabitants together and compel them to group themselves among the various series of workers. And the whole mechanism would rest in that: the workman choosing the task which he could perform most joyously, not riveted for ever to one and the same calling, but passing from one form of work to another. Moreover, the world would not be revolutionised all of a sudden, the beginnings would be small, the system being tried first of all in some township of a few thousand souls. The dream would then approach fulfilment, the phalange, the unit at the base of the great human army would be created; the phalanstery, the common house, would be built. At first, too, one would simply appeal to willing

men, and link them together in such wise as to form an association of capital, work, and talent. Those who now possessed money, those whose arms were strong, and those who had brains would be asked to come to an understanding and combine, putting their various means together. They would produce with an energy and an abundance far greater than now, and they would divide the profits they reaped as equitably as possible, until the day came when capital, work, and talent might be blended together and form the common patrimony of a free brotherhood, in which everything would belong to everybody amidst general harmony.

At each page of the little book which Luc was reading the loving splendour of its title '*Solidarité*' became more and more apparent. Certain phrases shone forth like beacon-fires. Man's reason was infallible; truth was absolute; a truth demonstrated by science became irrevocable, eternal. Work was to be a festival. Each man's happiness would some day rest in the happiness of others. Neither envy nor hatred would be left when room was at last found in the world for the happiness of one and all. In the social machine, all intermediaries that were useless and led to a waste of strength would be suppressed; thus commerce, as it is now understood, would be condemned, and the consumer would deal with the producer. All parasitic growths, the innumerable vegetations living upon social corruption, upon the permanent state of war in which men now languish, would be mown down. There would be no more armies, no more courts of law, no more prisons! And, above all, amidst the great Dawn which would thus have risen, there would appear Justice flaming like the sun, driving away misery, giving to each being that was born the right to live and partake of daily bread, and allotting to one and all his or her due share of happiness.

Luc had ceased reading: he was reflecting now. The whole great, heroic Nineteenth Century spread out before his mind's eye, with its continuous battling, its dolorous, valiant efforts to attain to truth and justice. The irresistible democratic advance, the rise of the masses filled that century from end to end. The Revolution at the end of the previous one had brought only the middle classes to power; another century was needed for the evolution to become complete, for the people to obtain its share of influence. Seeds germinated, however, in the old and often ploughed monarchical soil; and already during the days of '48 the question of the wage-

system was plainly brought forward, the claims of the workers becoming more and more precise, and shaking the new *régime* of the *bourgeois*, whom egotistical and tyrannical possession was in their turn rotting. And now, on the threshold of the new century, as soon as the spreading onrush of the masses should have carried the old social framework away, the reorganisation of labour would prove the very foundation-stone of future society, which would only be able to exist by a just apportionment of wealth. The violent crisis which had overthrown empires when the old world passed from servitude to the wage-system was as nothing compared with the terrible crisis which for the last hundred years had shaken and ravaged nations, that crisis of the wage-system passing through successive evolutions and transformations, and tending to become something else. And from that something else would be born the happy and brotherly social system of to-morrow.

Luc gently put down the little book and blew out his light. He had grown calmer now, and could feel that peaceful, restoring sleep was approaching. True, no precise answers had come to the urgent appeals which had previously upset him; but he heard those appeals no more. It was as if the disinherited beings who had raised them were now conscious that they had been heard, and were taking patience. Seed was sown and the harvest would rise. Luc himself was troubled with no more feverishness, he felt that his mind was pregnant with ideas, to which indeed it might give birth on the very morrow if his night's slumber should be good. And he ended by yielding to his great need of repose, and fell with delight into a deep sleep, visited by genius, faith, and will.

When he awoke at seven o'clock on the following morning his first thought on seeing the sun rise in the broad clear sky was to go out without warning the Jordans and climb the rocky stairway leading to the smeltery. He wished to see Morfain again, and obtain certain information from him. In this respect he was yielding to a sudden inspiration. With reference to the advice which Jordan had asked of him, he desired above all to arrive at some precise opinion respecting the old abandoned mine. The master-smelter, a son of the mountains, must know, he thought, every stone of it. And indeed Morfain, whom he found up and about, after his night spent beside the furnace, which decidedly had now recovered

from its ailment, became quite impassioned directly the mine was mentioned to him. He had always had an idea of his own, which nobody would heed, although he had often given expression to it. To his thinking, old Laroche, the engineer, had done wrong in despairing and forsaking the mine directly the working of it had failed to prove remunerative. The vein which had been followed had certainly become an abominable one, charged with sulphur and phosphates to such a degree that nothing good came out in the smelting. But Morfain was convinced that they were simply crossing a bad vein, and that it would be sufficient to carry the galleries further, or to open fresh ones at a point of the gorge which he designated, in order to find once more the same excellent ore as formerly. And he based his opinion upon observation, upon knowledge of all the rocks of the region, which he had scaled and explored for forty years. As he put it, he was not a man of science, he was only a poor toiler, and did not presume to compete with those gentlemen the engineers. Nevertheless he was astonished that no confidence was shown in his keen scent, and that his superiors should have simply shrugged their shoulders without consenting to test his predictions by a few borings.

The man's quiet confidence impressed Luc the more especially since he was inclined to pass a severe judgment on the inertia of old Laroche, who had left the mine in an abandoned state even after the discovery of the chemical process which would have allowed the defective ore to be profitably utilised. That alone showed into what slumberous routine the working of the furnace had fallen. The mine ought to be worked again immediately, even if they had to rest content with treating the ore chemically. But what would it be if Morfain's convictions should be realised, and they should again come upon rich and pure lodes! Thus Luc immediately accepted the master-smelter's proposal to take a stroll in the direction of the abandoned galleries, in order that the other might explain his ideas on the spot. That clear and fresh September morning, the walk among the rocks, through the lonely wilds fragrant with lavender, was delightful. During three hours the two men climbed up and down the sides of the gorges, visiting the grottoes, following the pine-covered ridges where the rocks jutted up through the soil like portions of the skeleton of some huge buried monster. And by degrees Morfain's conviction gained

upon Luc, bringing him at least a hope that there in that spot lay a treasure which man in his sloth had passed by, and which earth, the inexhaustible mother, was prepared to yield to those who might seek it.

As it was more than noon when the explorations terminated Luc accepted a proposal to lunch off eggs and milk up in the Bleuse Mountains. When about two o'clock he came down again, delighted, his lungs inflated by the free mountain air, the Jordans received him with exclamations, for not knowing what had become of him they had begun to grow anxious. He apologised for not having warned them, and related that he had lost his way among the tablelands, and had lunched with some peasants there. He ventured to tell this fib because the Jordans, whom he found still at table, were not alone. As was their custom every second Tuesday of the month, they had with them three guests, Abbé Marle, Doctor Novarre, and Hermeline, the schoolmaster, whom Sœurette delighted to gather together, laughingly calling them her privy councillors, because they all three helped her in her charitable works. The doors of La Crêcherie which were usually kept closed, Jordan living there in solitude like some cloistered scientist, were thrown open for those three visitors, who were treated as intimates. It could not be said, however, that they owed this favour to their cordial agreement, for they were perpetually disputing together. But, on the other hand, their discussions amused Sœurette, and indeed rendered her yet more partial to them, since they proved a distraction for Jordan, who listened to them smiling.

'So you have lunched?' said Sœurette, addressing Luc. 'Still, that won't prevent you from taking a cup of coffee with us, will it?'

'Oh! I'll accept the cup of coffee,' he answered gaily. 'You are too amiable—I deserve the bitterest reproaches.'

They then passed into the drawing-room. Its windows were open, the lawns of the park spread out, and all the exquisite aroma of the great trees came into the house. In a horn-shaped porcelain vase bloomed a splendid bouquet of roses—roses which Doctor Novarre lovingly cultivated, and a bunch of which he brought for Sœurette each time that he lunched at La Crêcherie.

Whilst the coffee was being served a discussion on educational matters began afresh between the priest and the school-

master, who had not ceased battling on this subject since the beginning of the lunch.

'If you can do nothing with your pupils,' declared Abbé Marle, 'it is because you have driven religion out of your schools. God is the master of human intelligence ; one knows nothing excepting through Him.'

Tall and sturdy, with his eagle beak set in a broad, full, regular face, the priest spoke with all the authoritative stubbornness born of his narrow doctrines, placing the only chance of the world's salvation in Catholicism, and the rigid observance of its dogmas. And, in front of him, Hermeline, the schoolmaster, slim of build and angular of face, with a bony forehead and pointed chin, evinced similar stubbornness, being quite as formalist and authoritative as the other in the practice of his own mechanical religion of progress, which last was to be arrived at by dint of laws and military discipline.

'Don't bother me,' said he, 'with your religion, which has never led men to aught but error and ruin. If I get nothing out of my pupils it is because, in the first place, they are taken from me too early, to be placed in the factories. And secondly, and more particularly, it is because there is less and less discipline, because the master is left without any authority. If a child is whipped nowadays the parents shriek like a pack of fools. But if I were only allowed to give those youngsters a few good canings I think I should open their minds a little.'

Then, as Sœurette, quite affected by this theory, began to protest, he explained his views. For him, given the general corruption, there was only one means of saving society, which was to subject the children to the discipline of liberty, insert belief in republican principles in them by force, if necessary, and in such a manner that they should never lose it. His dream was to make each pupil a servant of the State, a slave of the State, one who sacrificed to the State his entire personality. And he could picture nothing beyond one and the same lesson, learnt by all in one and the same manner, with the one object of serving the community. Such was his harsh and doleful religion, a religion in which the democracy was delivered from the past by dint of punishments, and then again condemned to forced labour, happiness being decreed under penalty of being caned.

But Abbé Marle obstinately repeated : 'Outside the pale of Catholicism there is only darkness,'



'Why, Catholicism is toppling over!' exclaimed Hermeline. 'It's for that very reason that we have to raise another social framework.'

The priest, no doubt, was conscious of the supreme battle which Catholicism was waging against the spirit of science, whose victory spread day by day. But he would not acknowledge it; he did not even admit that his church was gradually emptying. 'Catholicism!' he resumed, 'its framework is still so solid, so eternal, so divine, that you copy it when you talk of raising I know not what atheistical State in which you would replace the Deity by some mechanical contrivance appointed to instruct and govern men!'

'Some mechanical contrivance, why not!' retorted Hermeline, exasperated by the touch of truth contained in the priest's attack. 'Rome has never been aught but a wine-press, pressing out the blood of the world!'

When their discussions reached this violent stage Doctor Novarre usually intervened in his smiling and conciliatory way. 'Come, come, don't get heated!' said he. 'You are on the point of agreeing, since you have got so far as to accuse one another of copying your religions one from the other.'

Short and spare, with a slender nose and keen eyes, the doctor was a man of a tolerant, gentle, but slightly sarcastic turn of mind, one who, having given himself to science, refused to let himself be excited by political and social questions. Like Jordan, whose great friend he was, he often said that he only adopted truths when they had been scientifically demonstrated. Modest, timid, too, as he was, without any ambition, he contented himself with healing his patients to the best of his ability, and his only passion was for the rosebushes which he cultivated between the four walls of the garden of the little dwelling where he lived in happy peacefulness.

Luc had hitherto contented himself with listening. But at last he recalled what he had read the previous night, and he then spoke out: 'The terrible part of it,' said he, 'is that in our schools the starting-point is invariably the idea that man is an evil being, who brings into the world with him a spirit of rebellion and sloth, and that a perfect system of punishments and rewards is necessary if one is to get anything out of him. Thus education has been turned into torture, and study has become as repulsive to our brains as manual labour is to our limbs. Our professors have been

turned into so many gaolers ruling a scholastic penitentiary, and the mission given to them is that of kneading the minds of children in accordance with certain fixed programmes, and running them all through one and the same mould, without taking any account of varying individualities. Thus the masters are no longer aught but the slayers of initiative; they crush all critical spirit, all free examination, all personal awakening of talent beneath a pile of ready-made ideas and official-truths, and the worst is that the characters of the children are affected quite as badly as their minds, and that the system of teaching employed produces in the long run little else but dolts and hypocrites.'

Hermeline must have fancied that he was being personally attacked, for he now broke in rather sharply: 'But how would you have one proceed then, monsieur? Come and take my place, and you will soon see how little you will get out of the pupils if you don't subject them one and all to the same discipline, like a master who for them is the embodiment of authority.'

'The master,' continued Luc with his dreamy air, 'should have no other duty than that of awakening energy and encouraging the child's aptitude in one or another respect by provoking questions from him and enabling him to develop his personality. Deep in the human race there is an immense insatiable craving to learn and know, and this should be the one incentive to study without need of any rewards or punishments. It would evidently be sufficient if one contented oneself with giving each pupil facilities for prosecuting the particular studies that pleased him, and with rendering those studies attractive to him, allowing him to engage in them by himself, then progress in them by the force of his own understanding, with the continually recurring delight of making fresh discoveries. For men to make their offspring men by treating them as such, is not that the whole educational problem which has to be solved?'

Abbé Marle, who was finishing his coffee, shrugged his broad shoulders; and, like a priest whom dogma endowed with infallibility, he remarked: 'Sin is in man, and he can only be saved by penitence. Idleness, which is one of the capital sins, can only be redeemed by labour, the punishment which God imposed on the first man after the fall.'

'But that's an error, Abbé,' quietly said Doctor Novarre. 'Idleness is simply a malady when it really exists, that is,

when the body refuses to work, shrinks from all fatigue. You may be certain then that this invincible languor is a sign of grave internal disorder. And apart from that, where have you ever seen idle people? Take those who are so-called idle people by race, habit, and taste. Does not a society lady, who dances all night at a ball, do greater harm to her eyesight and expend far more muscular energy than a workwoman who sits at her little table embroidering till daylight? Do not the men of pleasure, who are for ever figuring in public, taking part in exhausting festivities, work in their own way quite as hard as the men who toil at their benches and anvils? And remember how lightly and joyfully, on emerging from some repulsive task, we all rush into some violent amusement or exercise which tires out our limbs. The meaning of it all is that work is only oppressive when it does not please us. And if one could succeed in imposing on people only such work as would be agreeable to them, as they might freely choose, there would certainly be no idlers left.'

But Hermeline in his turn shrugged his shoulders, saying: 'Ask a child which he prefers, his grammar or his arithmetic. He will tell you that he prefers neither. The whole question has been threshed out; a child is a sapling which needs to be trained straight and corrected.'

'And one can only correct,' said the priest, this time in full agreement with the schoolmaster, 'by crushing everything in any way shameful or diabolic that original sin has left in man.'

Silence fell. Sœurette had been listening intently, whilst Jordan, looking out through one of the windows, let his glance stray thoughtfully under the big trees. In the words of the priest and the schoolmaster Luc recognised the pessimist conceptions of Catholicism adopted by the sectarian followers of progress, which the State was to decree by exercise of authority. Man was regarded as a child ever in fault. His passions were hunted down: for centuries efforts had been made to crush them, to kill the man which was within man. And then again, Luc recalled Fourier, who had preached quite another doctrine: the passions, utilised and ennobled, becoming necessary creative energies, whilst man was at last delivered from the deadly weight of the religions of nothingness, which are merely so many hateful social police systems devised to maintain the usurpation of the powerful and the rich.

And Luc, as though reflecting aloud, thereupon resumed, 'It would be sufficient to convince people of this truth, that the greater the happiness realised for all, the greater will be the happiness of the individual.'

But Hermeline and Abbé Marle began to laugh.

'That's no use!' said the schoolmaster. 'To awaken energy, you begin by destroying personal interest. Pray explain to me what motive will prompt man to action when he no longer works for himself? Personal interest is like the fire under the boiler, it will be found at the outset of all work. But you would crush it, and although you desire man to retain all his instincts you begin by depriving him of his egotism. Perhaps you rely on conscience, on the idea of honour and duty?'

'I don't need to rely on that,' Luc answered in the same quiet way. 'Truth to tell, egotism, such as we have hitherto understood it, has given us such a frightful social system, instinct with so much hatred and suffering, that it would really be allowable to try some other factor. But I repeat that I accept egotism if by such you mean the very legitimate desire, the invincible craving, which each man has for happiness. Far from destroying personal interest, I would strengthen it by making it what it ought to be in order to bring about the happy community in which the happiness of each will be the outcome of the happiness of all. Besides, it is sufficient that we should be convinced that in working for others we are working for ourselves. Social injustice sows eternal hatred, and universal suffering is the crop. For those reasons an agreement must be arrived at for the reorganisation of work based upon the certainty that our own highest felicity will some day be the result of felicity in the homes of our neighbours.'

Hermeline sneered, and Abbé Marle again broke in: "'Love one another," that is the teaching of our Divine Master. Only He also said that happiness was not of this world, and it is assuredly guilty madness to attempt to set the Kingdom of God upon this earth when it is in heaven.'

'Yet that will some day be done,' Luc retorted. 'The whole effort of mankind upon its march, all progress and all science, tend to that future city of happiness.'

But the schoolmaster, who was no longer listening, eagerly assailed the priest: 'Ah! no, Abbé, don't begin again with your promises of a celestial paradise; they are only fit

to dupe the poor. And besides, Jesus of Nazareth really belongs to us; you stole Him from us, and arranged His sayings and everything else in order to suit the purposes of your domination. As a matter of fact, He was simply a revolutionary and a free-thinker!'

Thus the battle began anew, and Doctor Novarre had to calm them once more by showing that one was right in certain respects and the other in others. As usual, however, the various questions which had been debated remained in suspense, for no final solution was ever arrived at. The coffee had been drunk long since, and it was Jordan who, in his thoughtful manner, put in the last word.

'The one sole truth,' said he, 'lies in Work; the world will some day become such as Work will make it.'

Then Sœurette, who, without intervening, had listened to Luc with passionate interest, spoke of a refuge which she thought of establishing for the infant children of factory women. From that moment the doctor, schoolmaster, and priest engaged in quiet and friendly conversation as to how this asylum might best be organised, and the abuses of similar establishments avoided. And, meantime, the shadows of the great trees lengthened over the lawns of the park, and the wood-pigeons flew down to the grass in the golden September sunshine.

It was already four o'clock when the three guests quitted La Crèche. Jordan and Luc, for the sake of a little exercise, accompanied them as far as the first houses of the town. Then, on their way back across some stony fields which Jordan left uncultivated, the latter suggested that they should extend their stroll a little in order to call upon Lange the potter. Jordan had allowed him to instal himself in a wild nook of his estate below the smeltery, asking no rent or other payment from him. And Lange, like Morfain, had made himself a dwelling in a rocky cavity which some of the old torrents rushing past the lower part of the Bleuse Mountains had excavated in the gigantic wall formed by the promontory. Moreover, he had ended by constructing three kilns near the slope whence he took his clay; and he lived there without God or master amidst all the free independence of his work.

'No doubt he's a man of extreme views,' added Jordan, in answer to a question from Luc, who felt greatly interested in Lange. 'What you told me about his violent outburst in

the Rue de Brias the other evening did not surprise me. He was lucky in getting released, for the affair might have turned out very badly for him. But you have no notion how intelligent he is, and what art he puts into his simple earthen pots, although he has virtually had no education. He was born hereabouts, and his parents were, poor work-people. Left an orphan at ten years of age, he worked as a mason's help, then as an apprentice potter, and now, since I've allowed him to settle on my land, he is his own employer, as he laughingly puts it. . . . I am the more particularly interested in some attempts he is making with refractory clay, for, as you know, I want to find the clay best suited to resist the terrible temperature of my electrical furnaces.'

At last, on looking up, Luc perceived Lange's dwelling-place among the bushes. Faced by a little parapet of dry stones, it suggested a barbarian camp. And as the young man saw a tall, shapely, dark-complexioned girl erect upon the threshold he inquired: 'Is Lange married, then?'

'No,' replied Jordan, 'but he lives with that girl, who is both his slave and his wife. It is quite a romance. Five years ago, when she was barely fifteen, he found her lying in a ditch, very ill, half dead in fact, abandoned there by some band of gypsies. Nobody has ever known exactly where she came from; she herself won't answer when she's questioned. Well, Lange carried her home upon his shoulders, nursed her and cured her, and you can't imagine the ardent gratitude that she has always shown him since. She lacked even shoes for her feet when he found her. Even to-day she seldom puts any on, unless indeed she is going down into the town; in such wise that the whole district and even Lange himself call her 'Barefeet.' She is the only person that he employs, she helps him with his work and even in dragging his barrow when he goes about the fairs to sell his pottery, for that is his way of disposing of his goods, which are well known throughout the region.'

Erect on the threshold of the little enclosure, which had a gate of open fencing, Barefeet watched the gentlemen approach, and thus Luc on his side was well able to examine her with her dark regular-featured face, her hair black as ink, and her large wild eyes, which became full of ineffable tenderness whenever they turned upon Lange. The young man also remarked her bare feet, childish feet, of a light bronze hue,

resting in the clayey soil, which was always damp. And she stood there in working costume, that is, barely clad in garments of grey linen, and showing her shapely legs and muscular arms. When she had come to the conclusion that the gentleman accompanying the owner of the estate was a friend, she quitted her post of observation, and, after warning Lange, returned to the kiln which she had previously been watching.

'Ah! it's you, Monsieur Jordan,' exclaimed Lange, in his turn presenting himself. 'Do you know that since that affair the other evening Barefeet is for ever imagining that people are coming to arrest me. I fancy that if any policeman should present himself here he would not escape whole from her clutches . . . You have come to see my last refractory bricks, eh? Well, here they are—I'll tell you the composition.'

Luc readily recognised the knotty little man, of whom he had caught a glimpse amidst the gloom of the Rue de Brias whilst he was announcing the inevitable catastrophe, and cursing that corrupt town of Beauclair, whose crimes had condemned it. Only, as he now scrutinised him in detail, he was surprised by the loftiness of his brow, over which fell a dark tangle of hair, and the keenness of his eyes, which glittered with intelligence, and at times flared up with anger. Most of all, however, the young fellow was surprised at divining beneath a rugged exterior and apparent violence a man of contemplative nature, a gentle dreamer, a simple rustic poet, who, urged on by his absolute ideas of justice, had finally come to the point of desiring to annihilate the old and guilty world.

After introducing Luc as an engineer, a friend of his, Jordan asked Lange with a laugh to show the young man what he called his museum.

'Oh! if it can interest the gentleman, willingly,' said Lange; 'they are merely things which I fire for amusement's sake—there, all that pottery under the shed. You may give it all a glance, monsieur, while I explain my bricks to Monsieur Jordan.'

Luc's astonishment increased. Under the shed he found a number of faience figures, vases, pots, and dishes of the strangest shapes and colours, which, whilst denoting great ignorance on the maker's part, were yet delightful in their original naïveté. The firings had at times yielded some superb results; much of the enamel displayed a wondrous richness of tone. But what particularly struck the young

man among the current pottery which Lange prepared for his usual customers at the markets and fairs, the crockery, the stock-pots, the pitchers and basins, was the elegance of shape and charm of colour which showed forth like some florescence of the popular genius. It seemed indeed as if the potter had derived his talent from his race, that those creations of his, instinct with the soul of the masses, sprang naturally from his big fingers, as though in fact he had intuitively rediscovered the primitive models, so full of practical beauty.

When Lange came back with Jordan, who had ordered of him a few hundred bricks with which it was intended to try a new electrical furnace, he received with a smile the congratulations tendered him by Luc, who marvelled at the gaiety of the faïences, which looked so bright, so flowery with purple and azure, in the broad sunlight.

'Yes, yes,' said the potter, 'they set a few poppies and cornflowers, as it were, in people's houses. I've always thought that roofs and house-fronts ought to be decorated in that style. It would not cost very much, if the tradesmen would only leave off thieving; and you'd see, too, how pleasant a town would look—quite like a nosegay set in greenery. But there's nothing to be done with the dirty *bourgeois* of nowadays!'

Then he at once lapsed into his sectarian passion, plunged into the ideas of Anarchy which he had derived from a few pamphlets that by some chance had fallen into his hands. First of all one had to destroy everything, seize everything in revolutionary style. Salvation would only be obtained by the annihilation of all authority, for if any, even the most insignificant, remained standing, it would suffice for the reconstruction of the whole edifice of iniquity and tyranny. Next the free commune, without any government whatever, might be established by means of agreement between different groups, which would incessantly be varied and modified, according to the desires and needs of each. Luc was struck at finding in this theory much that had been devised by Fourier, and indeed the ultimate dream was the same, even if the roads to be followed were different. Thus the Anarchist was but a Fourierist, a disabused and exasperated Collectivist, who no longer believed in political means, but was resolved to use force and extermination as his instrument to reach social happiness, since centuries of slow evolution seemed unlikely to achieve it. And thus, when Luc mentioned Bonnaire,



Lange became quite ferocious in his irony, showing more bitter disdain for the master-puddler than he would have shown for a *bourgeois*. Ah, yes, indeed! Bonnaire's barracks, that famous Collectivism in which one would be numbered, disciplined, imprisoned as in a penitentiary! And stretching out his fist towards Beauclair, whose roofs he overlooked, the potter once more poured his lamentation, his prophetic curse, upon that corrupt town which fire would destroy, and which would be razed to the very ground in order that the city of truth and justice might at last rise from its ashes.

Astonished by this violence, Jordan looked at him curiously, saying: 'But, Lange, my good fellow, you are not so badly off.'

'I, Monsieur Jordan, I'm very happy, as happy as one can be. I live in freedom here, and it's almost the realisation of anarchy. You have let me take this little bit of earth, the earth which belongs to us all, and I'm my own master; I pay rent to nobody. Then, too, I work as I fancy; I've no employer to crush me, and no workman for me to crush; I myself sell my pots and pitchers to good folk who need them, without being robbed by tradesmen or allowing them to rob customers. And when I'm so inclined I've still time to amuse myself by firing those faience figures and ornamental pots and plates, whose bright colours please my eyes. Ah! no, indeed, we don't complain, we feel happy in living when the sun comes to cheer us. Isn't that so, Barefeet?'

The girl had drawn near, with her hands quite pink from removing a pot from the wheel. And she smiled divinely as she looked at the man, the god whose servant she had made herself, and to whom she wholly belonged.

'But all the same,' resumed Lange, 'there are too many poor devils suffering, and so we shall have to blow up Beauclair one of these fine mornings in order that it may be built again properly. Propaganda by deeds is the only thing that is of any good; only bombs can rouse the people. And do you know that I've everything here that's necessary to prepare two or three dozen bombs which would prove wonderfully powerful. Some fine day, perhaps, I shall start off with the barrow, which I pull in front, you know, while Barefeet pushes it behind. It's fairly heavy when it is laden with pottery, and one has to drag it along the bad village roads from market to market. So we take a rest now and again under the trees, at spots where there are springs handy.

Only, that day, we sha'n't quit Beauclair, we shall go along all the streets, and there'll be a bomb hidden in each stock-pot. We shall deposit one at the sub-prefecture, another at the town-hall, another at the law courts, then another at the church, at all the places in fact where there's anything in the shape of authority to be destroyed. The matches will burn, each will last the necessary time. Then all at once Beauclair will go up! A frightful eruption will burn it and carry it away. Eh? What do you think of that, of my little promenade, with my barrow, and my little distribution of the stock-pots I'm making to bring about the happiness of mankind?'

He laughed a laugh of ecstasy, his face all aglow with excitement, and as the beautiful dark girl began to laugh with him he turned and said to her: 'Isn't that so, Barefeet? I'll pull and you shall push, and it will be even a finer walk than the one we take under the willows alongside the Mionne when we go to the fair at Magnolles!'

Jordan did not argue the point, but made a gesture as much as to say that he, as a scientist, regarded such a conception as imbecility. But when they had taken leave and were returning to La Crêcherie Luc quivered at the thought of that black poem, that dream of ensuring happiness by destruction, which thus haunted the minds of a few primitive poets among the disinherited classes. And thus, each deep in his own meditations, the two men went homeward in silence.

On repairing direct to the laboratory they there found Sœurette quietly seated at a little table, where she was making a clean copy of one of her brother's manuscripts. She just raised her head and smiled at him and his companion, then turned to her task once more.

'Ah!' said Jordan, throwing himself back in an arm-chair, 'it is quite certain that my only good time is that which I spend here among my appliances and papers. As soon as I come back to this laboratory, hope and peace seem to rise to my heart once more.'

He glanced affectionately around the spacious room, whose large windows were open, the glow of the setting sun entering warmly and caressingly, whilst between the trees one saw the roofs and casements of Beauclair shining in the distance.

'How wretched and futile all those disputes are!' Jordan resumed, whilst Luc softly paced up and down. 'As I listened to the priest and the schoolmaster after lunch I felt astonished

that people could lose their time in striving to convince one another when they viewed questions from opposite standpoints, and could not even speak the same language. Please observe, that they never come here without beginning precisely the same discussions afresh, and reaching absolutely the same point as on the previous occasion. And besides, how silly it is to confine oneself to the absolute, to take no account of experience, and to fight on simply with contradictory arguments! I am entirely of the opinion of the doctor, who amuses himself with annihilating both priest and school-master by merely opposing one to the other! And then, as regards that fellow Lange, can one imagine a man dreaming of more ridiculous things—losing himself in more manifest, dangerous errors, all through bestirring himself chancewise, and disdaining certainties? No, decidedly, political passions do not suit me; the things which those people say to one another seem to me devoid of sense, and the biggest questions which they broach are in my eyes mere pastimes for amusement on the road. I cannot understand why such vain battles should be fought over petty incidents, when the discovery of the smallest scientific truth does more for progress than fifty years of social struggling!'

Luc began to laugh. 'You are falling into the absolute yourself,' said he. 'Man ought to struggle, politics simply represent the necessity in which he finds himself to defend his needs and ensure himself the greatest sum of happiness possible.'

'You are right,' acknowledged Jordan, with his simple good faith. 'Perhaps my disdain for politics merely comes from some covert remorse, some desire to live in ignorance of the country's political affairs in order to avoid being disturbed by them. But, sincerely now, I think that I am still a good citizen in shutting myself up in my laboratory, for each serves the nation according to his lights. And assuredly the real revolutionaries, the real men of action, those who do the most to ensure the advent of truth and justice in the future, are the scientists. A government passes and falls; a people grows, triumphs, and then declines; but the truths of science are transmitted from generation to generation, ever spreading, ever giving increase of light and certainty. A pause of a century does not count, the forward march is always resumed at last, and in spite of every obstacle mankind goes on towards knowledge. The objection that one will never know every-

thing is ridiculous ; the question is to learn as much as we can in order that we may attain to the greatest happiness possible. And so, I repeat it, how unimportant are those political jolts on the road in which nations take such passionate interest. Whilst people set the salvation of progress in the maintenance or fall of a ministry, it is really the scientist who determines what the morrow shall be by illuminating the darkness of the multitude with a fresh spark of truth. All injustice will cease when all truth has been acquired.'

Silence fell. Scurette, who had put down her pen, was now listening. After pondering for a few moments, Jordan, without transition, resumed : 'Work, ah ! work, I owe my life to it. You see what a poor, puny little being I am. I remember that my mother used to wrap me in thick rugs whenever the wind was at all violent ; yet it was she who set me to work, as to a *régime* which was certain to bring good health. She did not condemn me to crushing studies, forms of punishment with which growing minds are so often tortured. But she instilled into me a habit of regular, varied, and attractive work. And it was thus that I learnt to work as one learns to breathe and to walk. Work has become like the function of my being, the necessary natural play of my limbs and organs, the object of my life, and the very means that enables me to live. I have lived because I have worked ; some sort of equilibrium has been arrived at between the world and me ; I have given it back in work what it has brought me in the form of sensations, and I believe that all health lies therein, that is in well-regulated exchanges, a perfect adaptation of the organism to its surroundings. And, however slight of build I may be, I shall live to a good old age, that's certain, since like a little machine I have been carefully put together and wound up, and work logically.'

Luc had paused in his slow perambulation. Like Scurette he was now listening with passionate interest.

'But that is only a question of the life of beings, of the necessity of good hygiene, if one is to have good life,' continued Jordan. 'Work is life itself ; life is the continual work of chemical and mechanical forces. Since the first atom stirred to join the atoms near it, the great creative work has never ceased ; and this creative work, which continues and will always continue, is like the very task of eternity, the universal task to which we all contribute our store. Is not the universe an immense workshop, where there is never an

'off day,' where matter from the simplest ferments to the most perfect creatures acts, makes, brings forth unceasingly. The fields which become covered with crops work; the slowly growing forests work; the rivers streaming through the valleys work; the seas rolling their waves from one to another continent work; the worlds, carried by the rhythm of gravitation through the infinite, work. There is not a being, not a thing that can remain still, in idleness; all find themselves carried along, set to work, forced to contribute to the common task. Who or whatever does not work, disappears from that very cause, is thrust aside as something useless and cumbersome, and has to yield place to the necessary, indispensable worker. Such is the one law of life, which, upon the whole, is simply matter working, a force in perpetual activity tending towards that final work of happiness, an imperious craving for which we all have within us.'

For another moment Jordan reflected, his eyes wandering far away. Then he resumed: 'And what an admirable regulator is work, what orderliness it brings with it wherever it reigns! It is peace, it is joy, even as it is health. I am confounded when I see it disdained, vilified, regarded as chastisement and shame. Whilst saving me from certain death, it also gave me all that is good in me. And what an admirable organiser it is, how well it regulates the faculties of the mind, the play of the muscles, the rôle of each group in a collectivity of workers. It would of itself suffice as a political constitution, a human police, a social *raison d'être*. We are born solely for the sake of the hive: we none of us bring into the world more than our individual, momentary effort. All other explanations would be vain and false. Our individual lives appear to be sacrificed to the universal life of future worlds. No happiness is possible unless we set it in the solidary happiness of eternal and general toil. And this is why I should like to see the foundation of the Religion of Work—a hosannah to work which saves, work in which is to be found the one truth, and sovereign health, joy, and peace!'

He ceased speaking and Sœurette raised a cry of loving enthusiasm: 'How right you are, brother, and how true! how beautiful it is!'

But Luc seemed more moved even than she. He had remained standing there, motionless, his eyes gradually filling with light, as if he were some apostle illumined by a suddenly descending ray. And all at once he spoke: 'Listen, Jordan,

you must not sell your property to Delaveau, you must keep everything, both the blast-furnace and the mine. That's my answer, I give it you now because I have quite made up my mind upon the subject.'

Surprised by those words, the connection of which with what he had just said escaped him, the master of La Crêcherie started slightly and blinked. 'Why so, my dear Luc?' he asked. 'Why do you say that? Explain yourself.'

The young man, however, remained silent for a moment, overcome as he was by emotion. That hymn, that glorification of pacifying and reorganising work had suddenly raised him, carried him away in spirit, at last showing him the great horizon, which hitherto had been clouded in mist. To his eyes everything now acquired precision, grew animated, assumed absolute certainty. Faith also glowed within him, and his words came from his lips with extraordinary power of persuasion.

'You must not sell the property to Delaveau,' he repeated. 'I visited the abandoned mine to-day. Such as the ore is in the present veins, one can still derive good profit from it by subjecting it to the new chemical processes. And Morfain has convinced me that one will find excellent lodes on the other side of the gorge. There is incalculable wealth there. The blast-furnace will yield cast iron cheaply, and if it be completed by a forge, some puddling furnaces, rolling mills, steam hammers and so forth, one may again begin making rails and girders in such a way as to compete victoriously with the most prosperous steel-works of the north and the east.'

Jordan's surprise was increasing, becoming sheer consternation. 'But I don't want to get any richer,' he protested; 'I've too much money already; and if I desire to sell the place it is precisely in order to escape from all the cares of gain.'

With a fine, passionate gesture Luc broke in: 'Let me finish, my friend. It isn't you that I desire to enrich, it is the disinherited ones, the workers whom we were speaking of just now, the victims of iniquitous and vilified labour! As you have said, work ought of itself alone to be a social *raison d'être*. At the moment I heard you, the path to salvation became manifest to me. The happy community of to-morrow can only be brought about by such a reorganisation of work as will lead to an equitable apportionment of wealth,

the only solution by which our misery and sufferings may be dispelled lies in that. If the old social fabric, now cracking and rotting, is to be replaced by another it must be upon the basis of work, shared by all and benefiting all, accepted, indeed, as the universal law. Well, that is what I should like to attempt here, a reorganisation of work on a small scale, a brotherly enterprise, a rough draft, as it were, of the social system of to-morrow, which I should contrast with the other enterprises, those based upon the wage system, the ancient prisons where workmen are regarded as slaves and tortured and dishonoured.'

He went on speaking in quivering accents, outlining his dream, all that had germinated in his mind since his recent perusal of Fourier's theories. There ought to be an association between capital, work, and talent. Jordan would provide the money required, Bonnaire and his mates would give their arms, and his, Luc's, would be the brain that plans and directs. Whilst speaking, the young man again began to walk up and down, pointing vehemently the while towards the neighbouring roofs of Beauclair. It was Beauclair that he would save, extricate from the shame and crime in which he had seen it sinking for three days past. As he gradually unfolded his plan of action he marvelled at himself, for he had not thought that he had all this in him. But he at last saw things clearly, he had found his road. And he now replied to all the distressing questions which he had put to himself during his insomnia without then finding any answer to them. In particular he now responded to those appeals from the wretched which had come to him from out of the darkness. At present he distinctly heard those cries, and he went forward to succour the poor beings who raised them; he would save them by regenerated work, by work which would no longer divide men into inimical, all-devouring castes, but would unite them in one sole brotherly family, wherein the efforts of each would be directed to obtaining the happiness of all.

'But the application of Fourier's formula,' said Jordan, 'does not destroy the wage-system. Even among the Collectivists little of that system is changed excepting the name. To annihilate it, one would have to go as far as anarchy.'

Luc was obliged to admit the truth of this objection; and in doing so he passed his feelings and opinions in review. The theories of Bonnaire, the Collectivist, and the dreams of

Lange, the Anarchist, still lingered in his ears. The discussions between Abbé Marle, schoolmaster Hermeline, and Doctor Novarre, also seemed to begin afresh and continue endlessly. The whole made up a chaos of contrary opinions, particularly as Luc likewise recalled the objections exchanged by the precursors of Socialism, Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and Proudhon. Why was it then that amongst so many formulas he himself should choose those of Fourier? No doubt he was acquainted with a few fortunate applications of them, but he also knew how slowly attempts progressed, and what difficulties stood in the way of any decisive result. Perhaps his choice was due to the fact that revolutionary violence was quite repugnant to him personally, since he had set his scientific faith in ceaseless evolution, which has all eternity before it to achieve its ends. Moreover, a complete and sudden expropriation of present-day possessors could not be effected without terrible catastrophes which would increase the present sum of misery and sorrow. Would it not be best therefore to profit by the opportunity of such a practical experiment as lay before him, an attempt in which he would find contentment for his whole being: his own native goodness of heart and his faith in man's goodness also? He was upheld by some exalted heroic feeling, a faith, a kind of prescience, which seemed to make success a certainty. And, besides, even if the application of Fourier's formulas should not bring about the immediate end of the wage-system, it would at least be a forward step, it would tend towards the final victory, the destruction of capital, the disappearance of mere traders, commercial middle-men, and the annihilation of the power of money, that source of all evils whose uselessness would be proved. The great quarrel of the socialist schools is one as to the means which should be employed. The schools are all agreed as to the object in view, and they will all be reconciled when some day the happy community is at last established. It was the first foundations of that community which Luc desired to lay, by collecting scattered forces, associating men of good will together, and he was convinced that, given the frightful massacre now going on, there could be no better point of departure.

Jordan remained sceptical, however. 'Fourier had flashes of genius,' said he, 'that is certain. Only he has now been dead more than sixty years, and if he still retains a few



stubborn disciples I see no sign of his religion conquering the world.'

'Catholicism took four centuries to conquer a small part of it,' Luc quickly retorted. 'Besides, I don't adopt the whole of Fourier's views; I regard him simply as a wise man, to whom one day a vision of the truth appeared. Moreover, he is not the only one; others helped to prepare the formula and others will perfect it. One thing which you cannot deny is that the evolution now proceeding so rapidly dates from far back. The whole of our century has been given to the laborious engendering of the new social system which will arise to-morrow. Each day for a hundred years past the workers have been born a little more to social life, and to-morrow they will be masters of their destinies by virtue of that scientific law which ensures life to the strongest, healthiest, and worthiest. It is all that which we nowadays behold, the final struggle between the privileged few by whom wealth has been stolen, and the great toiling masses who wish to recover the possession of wealth of which they have been despoiled for long centuries. History teaches us how a few seized on the greatest happiness possible—to the detriment of all the others; and how since then all the wretched despoiled ones have never ceased to struggle furiously, eager to reconquer as much happiness as they could. For the last fifty years the contest has become merciless, and one now sees the privileged folk seized with fear, and slowly relinquishing of their own accord certain of their privileges. The times are approaching, one can feel it by all the concessions which the holders of land and wealth make to the people. In the political sphere much has been given it already, and it will also be necessary to give it much in the economic sphere. One sees nothing but new laws favouring the workers, humanitarian measures of all kinds, the triumphs too of associations and unions, and all announce the coming era. The battle between labour and capital has reached such an acute crisis that one can already predict the defeat of the latter. In time, the disappearance of the wage-system is certain. And this is why I feel convinced that I shall conquer by helping on the advent of that something else which will replace the wage-system, that reorganisation of work, which will give us more justice and a loftier civilisation.'

He was radiant with benevolence, faith, and hope. And continuing he went back to history, to the robberies perpe-

trated by the stronger in the earliest days of the world, the wretched multitude being reduced to slavery and the possessors piling crime upon crime in order that they might not be obliged to restore anything to those who were despoiled, and who perished by starvation or violence. And he showed the accumulation of wealth increased by time, and still now in the hands of a few, who held the country estates, the houses in the towns, the factories of the industrial centres, the mines where coal and metal slumber, the means of transport by road, canal, and rail, and then the Rentes, the gold and the silver, the millions which circulate through the banks, briefly the whole wealth of earth, all that constitutes the incalculable fortune of mankind. And was it not abominable that so much wealth should only lead to the frightful indigence of the greater number? Did not such a state of things demand justice? Could one not see the inevitable necessity of proceeding to a fresh apportionment of wealth? Such iniquity, in which on the one hand one beheld idleness gorged with possession, and on the other pain-racked labour, agonising in misery, had made man wolfish towards man.

Instead of uniting to conquer and domesticate the forces of nature, men wolfishly devoured one another. Their barbarous social system cast them to hatred and error and madness; infants and aged beings were abandoned, and woman was crushed down, to become a beast of burden for some, and a mere instrument of pleasure for others. The workers themselves, corrupted by example, accepted their servitude, bending their heads amidst the universal cowardice. And how frightful, too, was the waste of human fortune, the colossal sums spent on warfare, and all the money given to useless functionaries, to judges and to gendarmes! And then there was all the money which without necessity remained in the hands of the traders, those parasite intermediaries, whose gains were levied on the consumers! But, after all, this was only the daily loss of an illogical, badly constructed social system. Apart from it there was downright crime, famine deliberately organised by those who detained the instruments of labour, in order to protect their profits. They reduced the output of a factory, they imposed off-days upon miners, they created misery for purposes of economic warfare, in order to keep up high prices. And yet people were astonished that the machine should be cracking and collapsing beneath such a pile of suffering, injustice, and shame!

'No, no!' cried Luc, 'that cannot last, unless mankind is to disappear in a final attack of madness. The social compact must be changed, each man that is born has a right to life, and the earth is the common fortune of us all. The instruments of work must be restored to all, each must do his own share of the general labour. If history, with its hatreds, its wars, its crimes, has hitherto been nothing but the abominable outcome of original theft, of the tyranny of a few thieves who had to urge men on to murder one another, and institute law courts and prisons to defend their deeds of rapine, it is time to begin history afresh, and to set, at the dawn of the new era, a great act of equity, the restoration of the wealth of the earth to all men, work once again becoming the universal law of human society, even as it is that of the universe, in order that peace may be made among us and happy brotherliness at last prevail. And that shall be! I will work for it, and I will succeed!'

He seemed so passionate, so lofty, so victorious in his prophetic exaltation, that Jordan, marvelling, turned towards Sœurrette to say, 'Just look at him, is he not handsome?'

Sœurrette herself, quivering, pale with admiration, had not taken her eyes from Luc. It seemed as if a kind of religious fervour possessed her. 'Oh! he is handsome,' she murmured faintly, 'and he is good as well.'

'Only, my dear friend,' resumed Jordan, smiling, 'you are really an Anarchist, however much you may deem yourself to be an evolutionist. But you are right in holding that one begins by Fourier's formula, and ends by the free man in the free commune.'

Luc himself had begun to laugh. 'At all events,' said he, 'let's make a start; we shall see whither logic will lead us.'

Jordan had become thoughtful, however, and no longer seemed to hear him. He, the cloistered scientist, had been profoundly stirred, and if he still doubted the possibility of hastening mankind's advance, he no longer denied the utility of experiment.

'Individual initiative is no doubt in some respects all-powerful,' he said. 'To determine facts, one simply needs a man of will and action, some rebel of genius and free mind who brings the new truth with him. In cases of accident, when salvation depends on cutting a cable or splitting a beam, only a man and a hatchet are necessary. Will is everything, the saviour is he who wields the hatchet. Nothing resists,

mountains collapse and seas retire before an individuality that acts.'

'Twas that indeed; in those words Luc found an expression of the will and conviction glowing within him. He knew not yet what genius he brought with him, but he was pervaded by a strength that seemed to have been long accumulating, a strength compounded of revolt against all the injustice of centuries, and an ardent craving to bring justice into the world at last. His also was the freed mind, he only accepted such facts as were scientifically proved. He was alone too, he wished to act alone, he set all his faith in action. He was the man who dares, and that would be sufficient, his mission would be fulfilled.

Silence reigned for a moment, and then Jordan, with a friendly gesture of surrender, said: 'As I have already told you, there are hours of lassitude when I would give Delaveau the whole property, both the smeltery and the mine and the land, so as to rid myself of them and to be able to devote myself in peace to my studies and experiments. So take them, you—I prefer to give them to you, since you think you can turn them to good use. All that I ask of you is to deliver me completely from the burden, to leave me in my corner to work and finish my task, without ever speaking to me of these affairs again.'

Luc gazed at him with sparkling eyes, in which all his gratitude, all his affection, glittered. Then, without any hesitation, like one certain of the reply he would receive, he said: 'That is not all, my friend. Your great heart must do something more. I can undertake nothing without money, I need five hundred thousand francs<sup>1</sup> to establish the works I dream of, which will be like the foundation of the future city . . . I am convinced that I offer you a good investment, since your capital will enter into the association, and ensure you a large part of the profits.'

And as Jordan wished to interpose, he went on: 'Yes, I know that you do not desire to become any richer. Nevertheless you must live; and if you give me your money I shall strive to provide for all your material wants in such a manner that your peace as a worker shall never be disturbed.'

Once more did silence, grave, full of emotion, fall in that spacious room, where so much work was already germinating

<sup>1</sup> 20,000L.

for the harvests of the days to come. The decision that had to be taken was fraught with such great importance for the future that it set something like a religious quiver there during that august interval of suspense.

'Yours is a soul of renunciation and benevolence,' said Luc again. 'Did you not apprise me of it yesterday when you told me that you would not trade upon the discoveries you pursue, those electrical furnaces which will some day reduce human labour and enrich mankind with new wealth? For my part it is not a gift that I ask of you, it is brotherly help, help to enable me to lessen the injustice of the times and create some happiness in the world.'

Then, in very simple fashion, Jordan consented. 'I'm willing, my friend,' he said. 'You shall have the money to realise your dream. Only, as one never ought to tell a falsehood, I will add that, in my eyes, that dream is still only so much generous utopia, for you have not fully convinced me. Excuse the doubts of a scientist . . . But no matter, you are a good fellow; make your attempt—I will be with you!'

Luc, whom enthusiasm seemed to raise from the ground, gave a cry of triumph: 'Thanks! I tell you that the work is as good as done, and that we shall know the divine joy of having accomplished it!'

Sœurte lightherto had not intervened—she had not even stirred. But all the kindness of her heart had made itself manifest in her face, big tears of tender emotion filled her eyes. All at once, under some irresistible impulse, she rose, drew near to Luc, silent, distracted, and kissed him on the face, her tears gushing forth as she did so. Then, in her wondrous emotion, she flung herself into her brother's arms, and long remained sobbing there.

Slightly surprised by the kiss she had given the young man, Jordan anxiously inquired: 'What is the matter, little sister? At least you don't disapprove of what is proposed, do you? It is true that we ought to have consulted you. But there is still time—are you with us?'

'Oh, yes! oh, yes!' she stammered, smiling, suddenly radiant amidst her tears; 'you are two heroes, and I will serve you—dispose of me.'

Late on the evening of that same day, towards eleven o'clock, Luc leant out of the window of the little pavilion, as on the previous night, in order to inhale for a moment the calm fresh air. In front of him, beyond the uncultivated

fields strewn with rocks, Beauclair was falling asleep, extinguishing its lights one by one; whilst on the left the Abyss resounded with all the noise of its hammers. Never had the breathing of the pain-racked giant seemed to Luc more hoarse, more oppressed. But again, as on the previous night, a sound arose from across the road, so light a sound that he fancied it was caused by the beating wings of some night-bird. His heart suddenly palpitated, however, when he heard the sound afresh, for he recognised a gentle quiver of approach. And again he saw a vague, delicate, and slender form which seemed to float over the grass. Then, with the spring of a wild goat, a woman crossed the road, and threw him a little bouquet so skilfully that he once more received it on his lips like a caress. As on the previous night, too, it was a little bunch of mountain pansies, gathered just then among the rocks, and of such powerful aroma that he was quite perfumed by it.

'Oh, Josine, Josine!' he exclaimed, penetrated by infinite tenderness.

She it was who had returned, and who, naïve, simple like those very flowers, once again gave him her whole soul, ever with the same gesture of passionate gratitude. And he felt refreshed, revived, amidst all the physical and mental fatigue following upon so decisive a day. Were not those flowers already a reward for his first efforts, for his resolution to proceed to action? And it was in her, Josine, that he loved the suffering toilers, it was she whom he wished to save from monstrous fate. He had found her the most wretched, the most insulted and derided, so near to debasement that she was on the point of falling into the gutter. With her poor hand mutilated by work, she typified the whole race of the victims, the slaves, who gave their flesh for work or for pleasure. When he should have redeemed her, he would have redeemed the entire race. And she, too, was love, love that is needful for harmony, for the happiness of the city of the future.

He gently called her: 'Josine! Josine! It is you, Josine!' But without a word she was already fleeing, disappearing into the darkness of the uncultivated moor. Then he again called her: 'Josine! Josine! It is you, I know it, Josine; I want to speak to you!'

Thereupon, trembling but happy, she came back with the same light step, and paused on the road below the window. 'Yes, it is I, Monsieur Luc,' she murmured.

He did not hasten to speak, however—he was trying to see her better, so slim, so vague she was, like some vision which a wave of darkness would soon carry away. At last he spoke: 'Will you do me a service? Tell Bonnaire to come to speak with me to-morrow morning. I have some good news for him—I have found him some work.'

She showed her pleasure by a laugh, tinged with emotion, and so faint and musical that it recalled the warbling of a bird. 'Ah! you are kind! you are kind!' she murmured.

'And,' continued he in a lower voice, for he, likewise, was feeling moved, 'I shall have work for all who wish to work. Yes, I am going to try to provide a little justice and happiness for everybody.'

She must have understood him, for her laugh became yet more gentle, more expressive of passionate gratitude. 'Thank you, thank you, Monsieur Luc!' Then the vision began to fade, and Luc again saw the light shadow fleeing through the bushes, accompanied by another and smaller one, Nanet, whom he had not previously seen, but who was now bounding along beside his big sister.

'Josine! Josine! *Au revoir*, Josine!'

'Thank you, Monsieur Luc!'

He could no longer distinguish her, she had disappeared, but he still heard her expressions of gratitude and joy, that bird-like warble which the night breeze wafted to him; and it was instinct with an infinite charm which penetrated and enchanted his heart.

For a long time did he linger at the window, full of rapture and boundless hope. Between the Abyss, where accursed toil was panting, and La Guerdache, whose park formed a great black patch upon the low plain of La Roumagne, he perceived Old Beauclair, the workers' dwelling-place, with its shaky rotting hovels slumbering beneath the crushing weight of misery and suffering. There lay the cloaca which he wished to purify, the antique gaol of the wage-system, which must be razed to the ground with all its hateful iniquity and cruelty, in order that mankind might be cured of the effects of the long efforts to poison it. And on the same spot he was, in imagination, already raising the future city, the abode of truth, justice, and happiness, whose white houses he could already picture smiling freely and fraternally amongst delicate verdure, under a mighty sun of joy.

But, all at once, the whole horizon was illumined, a

great pink glow lighted up the roofs of Beauclair, the promontory of the Bleuse Mountains, the entire stretch of country. It was the glow of liquid metal running from the furnace of La Crêcherie, and Luc had, at first, taken it for the-dawn. But it was not dawn, it symbolised rather the setting of a planet—old Vulcan, tortured at his anvil, throwing forth his final flames. Work, hereafter, would no longer be aught than health and joy, to-morrow was coming fast.



## BOOK II

## I

THREE years went by, and Luc established his new factory, which gave birth to a whole town of workers. The land which lay below the ridge of the Bleuse Mountains extended over a space of some twelve hundred square yards, a great moor, which, sloping slightly, stretched from the park of La Crêcherie to the jumbled buildings of the Abyss. And the beginnings were necessarily modest, only a part of the moor was at first utilised, the rest being reserved for the extensions which it was hoped the future would justify.

The works stood against the rocky promontory, just below the blast-furnace, with which they communicated by two lifts. Pending the revolution which Jordan's electrical furnaces would effect, Luc had done little to the smeltery; he had improved it in a few matters of detail, and then left it in Morfain's hands to continue working according to old-time routine. But in the new works, both as regards the buildings and the plant, he had availed himself of all possible improvements in order to increase the output and diminish the labour of the workers. In a like spirit he desired that the houses of the workers, each of which stood in a garden, should be homes of comfort where family life might flourish. Some fifty were already built on the land near La Crêcherie, forming quite a little town advancing towards Beauclair. The building of each new house, indeed, was like a fresh step taken by the future city towards the conquest of the old, guilty and condemned one. Then, in the centre of the land, Luc had erected the common-house, a large building containing schools, a library, a hall for meetings and festivities, baths and so forth. This was all that he had retained of Fourier's phalanstery, leaving everybody free to build as he pleased, and only deeming collective action to be necessary for certain public services.

Finally, in the rear of the property some general stores had been established, and grew daily in importance. There was a bakery, a butcher's, a grocery department, not to mention others for clothes, utensils, all sorts of small indispensable articles, the whole being conducted on the principles of a co-operative society of consumers corresponding with the co-operative society of producers which controlled the works. All this, no doubt, was simply a beginning, but there was no dearth of life, and one could already see and judge the work. Luc would not have succeeded in making such rapid progress had not the happy thought occurred to him of interesting workmen of the building trades in the enterprise. One thing, too, which particularly delighted him was that he had managed to capture all the springs scattered among the higher rocks, for they yielded an abundance of fresh and pure water, which cleansed the works and the common-house, gave moisture to the gardens, where thick greenery arose, and brought health and delight to every home.

Now, one morning, Fauchard, the drawer at the Abyss, came strolling up to La Crêcherie to see some of his old mates. He, ever undecided and doleful, had remained under Delaveau, whereas Bonnaire had repaired to the new works, taking with him his brother-in-law Ragu, who in his turn had induced Bourron to follow. Those three then worked with Luc, and Fauchard wished to question them. In the state of hebetude to which fifteen years of labour, ever the same, ever a repetition of similar gestures amidst a similar glare, had reduced him, he felt incapable of arriving at any decision by himself. Such, indeed, had become his indolence of mind, that for long months he had been thinking of this visit without finding sufficient strength of will to make it. From the moment of entering the works of La Crêcherie he felt astonished.

Coming as he did from the grimy, dusty Abyss, into whose heavy, tumbledown halls the light scarcely entered, he marvelled, in the first instance, at the sight of the light airy halls of La Crêcherie, all brick and iron, through whose broad windows the sunshine streamed. All the workshops were paved with slabs of cement, in such wise that there was little dust; and the abundance of water facilitated frequent washings. Moreover, the place remained clean and was easily kept in such a condition, by reason of the new smoke-consuming apparatus with which all the fires were provided. Thus, in lieu of an infernal, cyclopean den there were bright,

shiny, spacious workshops in which toil seemed to lose much of its harshness. No doubt the employment of electricity was still very limited; there was still a deafening roar of machinery, and but little relief had been found for human efforts. Only among some of the furnaces had there been trials of mechanical appliances, which, although hitherto defective, encouraged the hope that man would some day be freed from excessive labour. At La Crêcherie they were feeling their way, so to say; and yet how great was the improvement which already resulted from cleanliness, air, and sunlight!

Fauchard had expected to find Bonnaire, the master-puddler, at his furnace, and was surprised to come upon him watching over a large rolling-machine for the making of rails.

'Hullo!' exclaimed the visitor, 'have you given up puddling then?'

'No,' Bonnaire replied, 'but we do a little bit of everything here. That's the rule of the place: two hours on one thing, two hours on another; and really, it's quite true that it rests one.'

As a matter of fact Luc did not easily induce the men whom he took on to quit whatever might be their specialty. Later, however, reforms would be realised, for the children were already passing through several apprenticeships, since work could only be made attractive by varying it, and giving but a few hours to any one particular form.

'Ah!' sighed Fauchard, 'wouldn't it just amuse me to do something else than draw crucibles out of my furnace! But then I can't, I don't know how!'

The noise made by the rolling machinery was so violent that he had to raise his voice to its highest pitch. At last he profited by a brief interval to shake hands with Ragu and Bourron, who were busily engaged in receiving the rails. All this again was quite a sight for Fauchard. The rails were not made in the same way as at the Abyss. He looked at them with confused thoughts, which he could not have put into words. That which more particularly made him suffer amidst his downfall, reduced as he was to the status of a mere tool, was the dim consciousness that he might have been a man of intelligence and will. It was indeed so sad to think what a free, healthy, joyful man he might have become if slavery had not cast him into that brutifying gaol, the Abyss! The rails, which ever grew longer before his eyes, seemed to

him like an endless railroad over which his thoughts glided away into the future, of which he had neither hope nor clear conception.

Under the hall adjacent to the great foundry the steel was melted in a special furnace, and the fusing metal was received in a large cast-iron pocket lined with refractory clay, which afterwards discharged it into moulds. Electrical rolling bridges, powerful cranes, raised and transported the heavy masses, brought them to the rolling-machines, and conveyed them to the riveting and bolting workshops. There were various sorts of rolling-presses, some of them gigantic, one for large pieces of steel required for bridges, for the frameworks of buildings and so forth; and others for such simple things as girders and rails whose dimensions did not vary. These were made with extraordinary speed and regularity. The steel billet, as dazzling as the sun, but short, and as thick as a man's trunk, was caught in the first cage between two rollers revolving inversely, and when it came forth from the throat it was already more slender. But it entered a second cage and came forth more slender still, and thus from cage to cage it was gradually shaped, till it at last assumed the correct outline and the regulation length of ten metres. All this, however, was not accomplished without a deafening uproar, a terrible noise of jaws between the cages, something akin to the mastication of a colossus, whom one could imagine munching all that steel. And rails succeeded rails with extraordinary rapidity; you could scarcely follow the billet as it grew thinner and longer, and sprang out at last as a rail, to be added to others and others, as if indeed railways were extending endlessly, penetrating into the depths of the least known lands, and girdling the whole earth.

'Who's all that for?' asked Fauchard in his bewilderment.

'For the Chinese!' answered Ragu by way of a joke.

But Luc was now passing the rolling-mills. He generally spent his mornings in the works, glancing into each hall and chatting like a mate with the men. He had been compelled to retain part of the old hierarchy, master workmen, foremen, engineers, and an office staff for account-keeping and commercial management. Nevertheless, he already effected considerable economy by constant care in reducing the number of managers and clerks. On the other hand, his immediate hopes had been realised. Although high-class lodges like those of former times had not yet been found in the

mine, the ore now extracted yielded by chemical treatment cheap iron of fair quality; in such wise that the manufacture of girders and rails, being sufficiently remunerative, ensured the prosperity of the works. They paid their way, the amount of business increased each year, and this was the important point for Luc, whose efforts were directed towards the future of the enterprise, convinced as he was that he should conquer if, at each division of profits, the workmen saw their comfort and happiness increase. None the less his daily life was full of alarms amidst that complicated creation of his; there were considerable advances to make, an entire little army to lead, and worries assailed him both as a reformer, as an engineer, and as a financier. Success seemed certain, yet he fully understood that the enterprise was still in a precarious stage, at the mercy of events.

Amidst the uproar, he only paused for a moment to smile at Bonnaire, Ragu, and Bourron, and he did not even notice Fauchard. He liked that hall where the rolling-machinery was installed, he was cheered by the sight of all the girders and rails made there; it was the good forge of peace, he sometimes exclaimed gaily. And he contrasted it with the evil forge of war—that neighbouring forge, the Abyss, where guns and projectiles were made at such great cost, and with so much care. To think of it! Such perfect appliances, metal worked with so much delicacy and skill, and all that simply to produce monstrous engines of warfare which cost nations millions upon millions, and ruined them whilst they waited for war, when indeed war did not arise to exterminate them. Ah! might the steel girders and frameworks be multiplied, might they build up useful edifices and happy cities, bridges to cross rivers and valleys, might rails for ever gush from the presses and form endless lines to abolish frontiers, bring nations together, and win the whole world over to the brotherly civilisation of to-morrow!

However, just as Luc passed into the large foundry where the great steam-hammer began to pound away, forging the armature of a gigantic bridge, the rolling machinery was suddenly stopped, and an interval ensued pending the starting of another section. Fauchard then drew nearer to his old mates, and some conversation ensued between them.

‘So things are going all right here; you are satisfied, eh?’ he inquired.

‘Satisfied, no doubt,’ Bonnaire replied. ‘The working

day is only one of eight hours, and as what one does is diversified, one doesn't get so tired as formerly, and the work seems pleasanter.'

He, so tall and strong, with his broad, good-natured, healthy face, was one of the chief mainstays of the new works. He belonged to the council of management, and felt very grateful to Luc for having taken him on at the moment when he had been obliged to quit the Abyss, and could not think of the morrow without apprehension. With his uncompromising Collectivist principles, however, he suffered at seeing La Crêcherie governed by a régime of mere association, in which capital retained its great influence. The revolutionary within him, the dreamer of the absolute, protested against such a thing. But at the same time he was sensible, he worked, and urged his mates to work with all devotion, until they should be able to judge the result of the experiment.

'And so,' resumed Fauchard, 'you earn a lot of money, double what you used to, eh?'

Ragu, with that evil laugh of his, began to jest: 'Oh! the double, indeed! Say a hundred francs a day, without counting the champagne and the cigars!'

He had simply followed Bonnaire's example in taking work at La Crêcherie. And though he did not find himself badly off, thanks to the relative comfort he enjoyed there, on the other hand the orderliness and preciseness of everything could scarcely be to his taste, for he was again becoming a railer, turning his happiness into derision.

'A hundred francs!' cried Fauchard in stupefaction. 'You earn a hundred francs, you do?'

Bourron, who still remained Ragu's shadow, then tried to improve on what his mate had said: 'Oh! a hundred francs just to begin with!' said he. 'And one is treated to the roundabouts on Sundays.'

But whilst the others sneered, Bonnaire shrugged his shoulders with disdainful gravity. 'Can't you see,' he exclaimed, 'that they are talking folly and making fun of you? Everything considered, after the division of the profits our daily earnings do not amount to much more than they did formerly. Only at each settlement they increase a little, and it's certain that they will some day become superb. Then, too, we have all sorts of advantages, our future is assured, and living costs us much less than formerly, thanks to our

co-operative stores and the gay little houses which are let to us almost for nothing. Certainly this isn't yet real justice, but all the same we are on the road to it.'

Ragu continued sneering, and a desire came to him to satisfy another hatred, for if he jested about La Crêcherie, he never spoke of the Abyss otherwise than with ferocious rancour.

'And what kind of face does that animal Delaveau pull nowadays?' he inquired. 'It amuses me to think that he must be quite wild at having another show erected close to his own, and one too that seems likely to do good business. He's in a rage, isn't he?'

Fauchard waved his arm vaguely and replied: 'Of course he must be in a rage, only he doesn't show it over much. And yet I really don't know, because I've enough worries of my own without troubling about those of other people. I've heard say that he doesn't care a fig about your works and the competition. He says, it seems, that cannons and shells will always be wanted, because men are fools and will always go on murdering one another.'

Luc, who was just then returning from the foundry, heard those last words. For three years past, since the day when he had prevailed on Jordan to keep the blast-furnace and establish forges and steel-works, he had known that he had an enemy in Delaveau. The blow had been a severe one for the latter, who had hoped to acquire La Crêcherie for a comparatively small sum payable over a term of years, and who in lieu thereof saw it pass into the hands of an audacious young man, full of intelligence and activity, possessed of such creative vigour that at the very outset of his operations he raised the nucleus of a town. Nevertheless after the anger born of his first shock of surprise, Delaveau had felt full of confidence. He would confine himself to the manufacture of ordnance and projectiles, in which line the profits were large ones, and in which he feared no competition. The announcement that the neighbouring works would resume the making of rails and girders had at first filled him with merriment, ignorant as he was that the mine would be worked afresh. Then, on understanding the situation, realising that large profits might be made by treating the defective ore chemically, he did not lose his temper, but declared to everybody that there was room for all enterprises, and that he would willingly leave the making of rails and girders to his

fortunate neighbour if the latter left him that of guns and shells. In appearance, then, peace was not disturbed, cold but polite intercourse was kept up. But in the depths of Delaveau's mind lurked covert anxiety, a fear of that centre of just and free work, so near to him, for in time its spirit might gain upon his own workshops and men. And there was yet other uneasiness on his part, an unacknowledged feeling that old scaffoldings were gradually cracking under him, that there were causes of rottenness which he could not control, and that on the day when the power of capital might fail him, his arms, however stubborn and vigorous they might be, would prove powerless to keep up the edifice, which would fall in its entirety to the ground.

In the inevitable and ever fiercer warfare which had begun between La Crêcherie and the Abyss, and which could only end by the downfall of one or the other of the works, Luc felt no pity for the Delaveaus. If he had some esteem for the man on seeing how energetically he worked, and how bravely he defended his opinions, he despised the woman, Fernande, though with his contempt there was mingled a kind of terror on divining in her a terrible force of corruption and destruction. That evil intrigue which he had detected at La Guerdache, the imperious subjugation of Boisgelin, that dull-witted coxcomb whose fortune was melting away in the hands of a devouring creature, filled him with growing anxiety, as if he foresaw in it some future tragedy. All his affection went out towards the good-hearted and gentle Suzanne, for she was the real victim, the only one worthy of his pity. He had been compelled to break off all intercourse with La Guerdache, and his only knowledge of what went on there was derived from chance reports. These indicated, however, that things were going from bad to worse, Fernande's wild demands increasing, whilst Suzanne only found energy to remain silent, closing her eyes for fear of some scandal. One day when Luc met her, holding her little boy Paul by the hand, in one of the streets of Beauclair, she gave him a long look in which he could read all her distress, and the friendship that she still retained for him in spite of the deadly struggle which now parted their lives.

As soon as Luc recognised Fauchard, he put himself on the defensive, for it was part of his plan to avoid all unnecessary conflicts with the Abyss. He was willing that men should come from the neighbouring works to offer their



services, but he did not wish it to be said that he tried to attract them. As a matter of fact, it was the workers of La Crêcherie who decided whether a new hand should be admitted or not. Accordingly, as Bonnaire had on various previous occasions spoken to him of Fauchard, Luc feigned a belief that the latter was trying to gain admittance from his former comrades. 'Ah! it's you, my friend,' said he; 'you've come to see if your old mates will make room for you, eh?'

The other, once more full of doubt, incapable of prompt resolution, began to stammer disjointed words. All novelty frightened him, accustomed as he was to blind routine. Those new works, those large, light, clean halls, filled him with emotion as if they formed part of some awesome place where it would be impossible for him to live. He was already eager to return to his black and pain-fraught *inferno*. Ragu had derided him. What was the good of changing, when nothing was certain? Besides, he dimly realised, perhaps, that it was too late for him to make a change.

'No, no, monsieur, not yet,' he stuttered; 'I should like to, but I don't know. I'll see a little later—I'll consult my wife.'

Luc smiled. 'Quite so, quite so—one has to please the women. *Au revoir*, my friend.'

Then Fauchard went off in an awkward way, astonished at the turn that his visit had taken, for he had certainly made it with the intention of asking for work, if he found the place to his liking, and one could earn more money there than at the Abyss.

For a moment Luc remained speaking to Bonnaire about some improvements which he wished to introduce into the rolling-machinery. But Ragu had a complaint to make. 'Monsieur Luc,' said he, 'a gust of wind has broken three more panes in the window of our bed-room. And I must warn you that this time we really won't pay. It all comes from our house being the first in the line of the wind that comes from the plain. One freezes in it.'

He was always complaining, always finding reasons for discontent. 'Besides, it's very simple, Monsieur Luc,' he added, 'you've only got to call at our house to see how it happens. Josine will show you.'

Since Ragu had been working at La Crêcherie Sœurette had prevailed on him to marry Josine; and thus they lived together in one of the little houses of the new town of workers, a house which stood between those of Bonnaire and Bourron.

As Ragu had considerably amended his ways, thanks to his new surroundings, there did not as yet seem to be any serious disagreement in his home. Only a few quarrels had broken out, caused chiefly by the presence of Nanet, who also lived in the house. Moreover, whenever Josine was sorrowful and inclined to shed tears, she carefully closed the window in order that her neighbours might not hear her weeping.

But a shadow had passed over Luc's brow. 'Very well, Ragu,' he simply said, 'I will call at your house.'

Then the conversation ceased, the machinery had begun to work once more, drowning the voices of one and all with a tremendous noise, which suggested the mastication of a giant. For another moment Luc watched the work, smiling at Bonnaire, encouraging Bourron and Ragu, striving to promote brotherly love among each gang of workers, for he was convinced that nothing can prove substantial and effective if love be lacking. At last he quitted the workshops, and repaired to the common-house, as he did each morning, in order to visit the schools. If it pleased him to linger in the halls of work, dreaming of future peace, he tasted the delight of a yet keener hope among the little world of children, by whom the future was personified.

The common-house, naturally enough, was as yet only a large, clean, gay building, in erecting which Luc had aimed at little beyond making the place as commodious as possible at a small cost. The schools occupied one wing of it, the library, recreation-hall, and baths being installed in the other one, whilst the meeting and festival-hall, together with various offices, occupied the central pile. The schools were divided into three distinct sections, first a kind of infant asylum, where mothers following various avocations could place their little ones, even when these were mere babes in swaddling clothes; secondly a school proper, comprising five divisions, in which a complete system of education was in force; and thirdly a series of workshops for apprentices. The pupils frequented the latter even whilst following their studies, acquiring familiarity with manual callings as their general knowledge developed. And the sexes were not separated, boys and girls grew up side by side, from the cradle to the workshop of apprenticeship, which they quitted in order to marry, passing meantime through the five classes of the school, where they sat side by side on the forms, mingling there as they were bound to mingle in after life.

To separate the sexes from infancy, to bring up boys and girls and educate them differently, one in ignorance of the other, does not this render them inimical, and does it not tend to pervert them by heightening the mystery of the laws of natural attraction? Peace will only be complete between the sexes on the common interest which ought to unite them becoming apparent to both, reared as comrades, knowing one another, deriving their knowledge of life from the same source, and setting forth on its road in order to live it logically and healthily even as it ought to be lived.

Sœurette had greatly aided Luc in organising the schools. Whilst Jordan, after giving the money he had promised, had shut himself up in his laboratory, refusing to examine accounts, or to discuss what measures should be adopted, his sister had begun to take a passionate interest in that new town which she saw germinating, rising before her eyes. The feelings of a teacher and a nurse had always been latent within her, and her benevolence, which hitherto had been unable to go beyond a few poor folk pointed out to her by Abbé Marle, Doctor Novarre, or Hermeline the schoolmaster, suddenly expanded in presence of Luc's large family of workers, who needed to be taught and guided and loved. She had at the outset chosen her special task; she did not refuse to help in organising the classes and the workshops for the apprentices, but she more particularly devoted herself to the infant-asylum, where she spent her mornings, satisfying her love for the little ones. One day, when it was suggested that she ought to marry she replied with some slight confusion and a pretty laugh: 'But haven't I all the children of others to look after?'

She had ended by finding an assistant in Josine, who, although now married to Ragu, remained childless. Each morning Sœurette employed her among the infants; and drawn together as they were by solicitude for the little ones, they had become good friends, however different in other respects might be the bent of their natures.

That morning, when Luc entered the white cool ward, he found Sœurette alone there. 'Josine hasn't been,' she explained; 'she sent word that she was not feeling well. Oh! it's merely a trifling indisposition, I believe.'

To Luc, however, there came a vague suspicion, and a shadow again darkened his glance. 'I have to call at her house—I will see if she needs anything,' he simply replied.

Then came the delightful visit to the cradles. They stood

all white alongside the white walls. Little pink faces lay smiling or sleeping in them. And there were some willing women with large dazzling aprons, soft eyes, and motherly hands, who, speaking gentle words, watched over all those little ones, those germs of humanity in whom the future was rising. Some of the children, however, were growing fast—there were little men and little women of three and four years of age, and these were at liberty, toddling or running about on their little legs without encountering too many falls. The ward opened on to a flowery verandah, whence a garden extended, and the whole troop disported itself in sunshine and warm air. Toys, such as jumping jacks, hung down from strings to amuse the smallest, whilst the others had dolls, or horses, or carts, which they dragged about noisily like future heroes in whom the need of action was awaking. And it warmed the heart to see those young folk growing thus gaily, and in comfort, for all the tasks of to-morrow.

‘Nobody ill?’ asked Luc, who lingered with delight amidst all the dawn-like whiteness.

‘Oh no! they are all lively this morning,’ Sœurlette replied. ‘We had two children taken with the measles the day before yesterday. But I did not receive them afterwards—they have been isolated.’

She and Luc had now gone out to the verandah, along which they went to visit the adjoining school. The glazed doors of the five class-rooms followed one after the other, allowing a view over the greenery of the garden, and the weather being warm these doors were at that moment wide open, in such wise that Luc and Sœurlette were able to glance into each room without entering.

Since the establishment of the school the masters had arranged quite a new programme of education. From the first class, in which they took the child before he could even read, to the fifth, in which they parted from him, after teaching him the elements of general knowledge necessary to life, they particularly strove to place him in presence of things and facts, in order that he might derive his learning from the realities of the world. They also sought to awaken a spirit of orderliness and method in each child; for without method there can be no useful work. It is method which classifies and enables one to go on learning without losing aught of the knowledge one has already acquired. The science of books was not condemned in the school at La Crèche, but it was

put back to its rightful secondary place, for a child only learns well such things as he sees, touches, or understands by himself. He was no longer bent like a slave over indisputable dogmas; his masters appealed to his initiative to discover, penetrate, and make the truth his own. By this system the individual energy of each pupil was awakened and stimulated. In like manner punishments and rewards had been abolished, no further recourse was had to threats or caresses to force idle lads to work. As a matter of fact there are no idlers, there are only ailing children, children who understand badly what is badly explained to them, children into whose brains obstinate attempts are made to force knowledge for which they are not prepared. This being so, in order to have good pupils at La Crèche it was found sufficient to utilise the immense craving for knowledge which glows within each human being, that inextinguishable curiosity of the child for all that surrounds him, a curiosity so great that he never ceases to weary people with questions. Thus learning ceased to be torture; it became a constant pleasure by being rendered attractive, the master contenting himself with arousing the child's intelligence, and then simply guiding it in its discoveries. Each has the right and the duty to develop himself. And self-development is necessary if one wishes a child to become a real man of active energy, with will-power to decide and direct.

Thus the five classes spread out, offering from the very first notions to the acquirement of all the scientific truths, a means for the logical, graduated emancipation of the intelligence. In the garden gymnastic appliances were installed, there were games, exercises of all kinds, in order that the body might be fortified, provided with health and strength whilst the brain developed and enriched itself with learning. In the first classes especially, a great deal of time was allowed for play and recreation. At the outset only short and varied studies, proportionate to the child's powers of endurance, were required. The rule was to confine the children within doors as little as possible: lessons were frequently given in the open air; walks were arranged and the pupils were taught amidst the things on which their lessons turned, now in workshops, now in presence of the phenomena of nature, among animals and plants, or beside watercourses and mountains. Then, too, efforts were made to give the children a notion of what mankind really was, and of the necessity for solidarity.

They were growing up side by side, they would always live side by side. Love alone was the bond of union, justice and happiness. In love was found the indispensable and all-sufficient social compact, for it was sufficient for men to love one another to ensure the reign of peace. That universal love which will spread in time from the family to the nation, and from the nation to all mankind, will be the sole law of the happy community of the future. It was developed among the children at La Crèche by interesting them in one another, the strong being taught to watch over the weak, and all giving rein to their studies, diversions, and budding passions in common. From all this would arise the awaited harvest—men fortified by bodily exercise, instructed in experience amidst nature, drawn together by brain and heart, and in this wise becoming true brothers.

However, some laughter and some shouts suddenly arose, and Luc felt a little anxious, for at times things did not pass off without disorder. In the middle of one of the class-rooms he perceived Nanet standing up. It was he, no doubt, who had caused the tumult.

‘Does Nanet still give you trouble?’ he asked Sœurette. ‘He’s a little demon, I fear.’

She smiled and made a gesture of indulgent excuse. ‘Yes, he is not always easily managed,’ she said. ‘And we have others too who are very turbulent. They push and fight one another, and show little obedience. But all the same they are dear little fellows. Nanet is very brave and good-natured. Besides, when they keep over-quiet we feel anxious, we imagine that they must be ill.’

After the class-rooms, beyond the garden, came the workshops for the apprentices. Instruction was given there in the principal manual callings, which the children practised less in order to acquire them perfectly, than to form an acquaintance with their *ensemble* and determine their own vocations. This teaching went on concurrently with the other studies. Whilst a child was acquiring the first notions of reading and writing, a tool was already placed in his hand; and if during the morning he studied grammar, arithmetic, and history, thereby ripening his intelligence, in the afternoon he worked with his little arms in order to impart vigour and skill to his muscles. This was like useful recreation, rest for the brain, a joyous competition in activity. The principle was adopted that every man ought to know a manual calling, in such wise

that each pupil on leaving the school simply had to choose the calling he himself preferred, and perfect himself in it in a real workshop. In like manner beauty flourished; the children passed through courses of music, drawing, painting, and sculpture, and in souls that were well awakened the joys of existence were then born. Even for those who had to confine themselves to the first elements such studies tended to an enlargement of the world, the whole earth taking a voice, and splendour in one or another form embellishing the humblest lives. And in the garden, at the close of fine days, amidst radiant sunsets, the children were gathered together to sing songs of peace and glory, or to be braced by spectacles of truth and immortal beauty.

Luc was finishing his daily visit when he was informed that two peasants of Les Combettes, Lenfant and Yvonnot, were waiting to speak to him in the little office opening into the large meeting-hall.

'Have they come about the stream?' asked Sœurette.

'Yes,' he replied, 'they asked me to fix an appointment. And for my part I greatly desired to see them, for I was talking again to Feuillat only the other day, and I am convinced that an understanding is necessary between La Crêcherie and Les Combettes if we desire to win the day.'

She listened to him smiling, like one who knew all his plans; and after pressing his hand she returned with her discreet, quiet step to her white cradles, whence would arise the future people that he needed for the fulfilment of his dream.

Feuillat, the farmer of La Guerdache, had ended by renewing his lease with Boisgelin under disastrous conditions for both parties. But it was necessary to live, as Feuillat said; and the farming system had become so defective that it could no longer yield any good results. It was leading, indeed, to the very bankruptcy of the soil. And so Feuillat, like the stubborn man he was, haunted by an idea which he imparted to nobody, covertly continued urging on certain experimental work which he desired to see tried near his farm. That is, the reconciliation of the peasants of Les Combettes, whom ancient hatreds parted, the gathering together in a commonalty of all their patches of land, now cut up into little strips, and the creation of one great estate, whence they would derive real wealth by applying the principles of high cultivation on a large scale. And the idea which Feuillat kept back in the

depths of his mind must have been that of persuading Boisselin to let the farm enter the new association, when the first experiments should have succeeded. If Boisselin should refuse, facts would end by compelling him to consent. In Feuillat moreover, silent man that he was, bending beneath such servitude as appeared inevitable, there was something of the nature of a patient, crafty apostle, who was resolved to gain ground by degrees, undeterred therefrom by any feeling of weariness.

He had just achieved a first success by reconciling Lenfant and Yvonnot, whose families had been quarrelling for centuries. The former having been chosen mayor of the village and the latter 'adjoint,' or deputy mayor, he had given them to understand that they would be the real masters if they could only agree together. Then he had slowly won them to his idea of a general agreement, by which alone the village could emerge from the wretchedness born of routine in which it vegetated, and once more find in the earth an inexhaustible source of fortune. As the works of La Crêcherie were at that time being established, he cited them as an example, spoke of their growing prosperity, and profiting by some water question which had to be settled between La Crêcherie and Les Combettes, he even ended by putting Lenfant and Yvonnot in communication with Luc. Thus it was that the village mayor and his deputy happened, that morning, to be at the works.

Luc immediately consented to what they came to ask him, and the good nature he evinced in doing so in some degree dispelled their habitual distrust.

'It's understood, messieurs,' said he, 'La Crêcherie will henceforth canalise all the springs captured among the rocks, and turn those which it does not employ into the Grand-Jean rivulet, which crosses the lands of your village before joining the Mionne. At little cost, if you only establish some reservoirs, you will have abundant means for watering your land and increasing its bearing qualities three times over.'

Lenfant, who was short and stout, wagged his big head and reflected: 'It will certainly cost too much,' said he. Then Yvonnot, who was short and slim, with a dark face and bad-tempered mouth, added: 'Besides, monsieur, one thing that troubles us is that this water will lead to a lot more disputes among us when we divide it. You act like a good neighbour in giving it to us, and we are much obliged to you.'



*Only, how are we to manage so that each may have his proper share without thinking that the others are robbing him ?'*

Luc smiled. The question pleased him, for it would enable him to broach the subject which he had on his mind, and on account of which he had so particularly desired to see the two men. 'But water which fertilises,' said he, 'ought to belong to everybody, just like the sun which shines and warms, and the land, too, which brings forth and nourishes. As for the best way to divide the water, why, the best is not to divide it at all. What Nature gives to all men should be left to all of them.'

The two peasants understood his meaning. For a moment they remained silent, with their eyes fixed on the floor. It was Lenfant, the greater thinker of the two, who at last replied. 'Yes, yes, we know. The farmer of La Guerdache spoke to us of all that. No doubt it's a good idea for folk to come to an agreement as you have done here, and put their money and land and arms and tools in common, and then share the profits. It seems certain that one would gain more and be happier in that fashion. But, all the same, there would be some risk in it, and I think that one will have to talk of it a good deal longer before all of us at Les Combettes are convinced.'

'Ah! yes, that's certain,' put in Yvonnot with a sudden wave of his arm. 'We two, you see, are now pretty well in agreement, and are not so much opposed to such novelties. But all the others have to be gained over, and that will take a lot of doing, I warn you.'

In those words lurked the peasant's distrust of all social changes affecting the conditions under which property is now held. Luc knew it well; he had expected resistance of this kind. However, he continued smiling. How heart-rending to some was the idea of having to give up one's strip of land, which from father to son one had loved for centuries, and to see it merged into the strips of others! Nevertheless all the many bitter disappointments due to that bankruptcy of the over-divided soil, which ended by filling agriculturists with despair and disgust, must help to convince them that the only possible salvation lay in union and joint effort. Luc explained that success would henceforth belong to associations, that it was necessary to operate over large tracts of land with powerful machines for ploughing, sowing, and reaping, with an

abundance of manure too, chemically prepared in neighbouring factories, and with continuous waterings by which the crops would be greatly increased. The efforts of the peasant who worked alone, in isolation, were leading to famine, but prodigious plenty would ensue if the peasants of a village would only combine together so as to work upon a large scale and procure the necessary machinery, manure, and water. Extraordinary fertility would be created thereby. Two or three acres would suffice to feed two or three families. The population of France might be trebled, its soil would amply suffice to nourish it if it were cultivated logically, all the creative forces working harmoniously together. And that would also mean happiness; the peasants' labour would not be one-third as painful as now; he would be liberated from all sorts of ancient servitude, that of the moneylender who preys upon him and that of the large landowner and the State, who likewise do their best to crush him.

'Oh! it's too fine!' declared Lenfant in his thoughtful way.

But Yvonnot took fire more readily. 'Ah! dash it!' said he, 'if that be true we should be fools not to try it.'

'You see how we are situated at La Crêcherie,' resumed Luc, who had been keeping a final argument in reserve. 'We have hardly been three years in existence, and our business prospers, all our hands who have combined together eat meat and drink wine, and they have no debts left and no fear for the future. Question them, and visit our workshops, our homes, our common house, all that we have managed to create in so short a time. It's all the fruit of union, and you yourselves will accomplish prodigies as soon as you become united.'

'Yes, yes, we've seen, we know,' the two peasants answered in chorus.

This was true; before asking for Luc they had inquisitively visited La Crêcherie, appraising the wealth already acquired, feeling amazed at the sight of that happy town which was springing up so rapidly, and wondering what gain there might be for themselves if they should combine in the same manner. The force of example was gradually winning them over.

'Well, since you know, it's all simple enough,' Luc gaily retorted. 'We need bread; our men can't live if you don't grow the corn that's necessary. And you others need tools, spades, ploughs, machines made of the steel which we manufacture. And so the solution of the problem is simple enough—'

we have only to come to an understanding together—we will give you steel, you will give us corn, and we shall all live very happily. Since we are neighbours, since your land adjoins our works, and we absolutely have need of one another, is it not best to live as brothers, to combine together for the benefit of every one of us, so as to form in future but one sole family?'

Luc's good-natured way of putting the proposal made Lenfant and Yvonnot merry. Never had the desirability of reconciliation and agreement between the peasant and the industrial worker been set forth more plainly. Luc dreamt, indeed, of incorporating in his association all the secondary factories and industries which lived on it or beside it. It was sufficient that there should be a centre producing a raw material—steel—for other manufactories to swarm around. There were the Chodorge works which made nails, the Hausser works which made scythes, the Mirande works which made agricultural machinery; and there was even an old wire-drawer, one Hordoir, whose couple of hammers, worked by water power derived from a torrent, were still active in one of the gorges of the Bleuse Mountains. All of these, if they desired to live, would some day be compelled to join their brothers of La Crêcherie, apart from whom existence would prove impossible. Even the men of the building trades and those of the clothing trades—as for instance Mayor Gourier's boot-works—would be dragged into the combination, and supply houses and garments and shoes even, if in exchange they desired to have tools and bread. The future city would only come about through some such universal agreement, a community of labour.

'Well, Monsieur Luc,' at last said Lenfant in his wise way, 'all these matters are too big to be decided in an off-hand manner. But we promise you that we will think them over and do our best to bring about a cordial agreement at Les Combettes, such as you have here.'

'That is just it, Monsieur Luc,' said Yvonnot, seconding his companion. 'Since we have got so far as to be reconciled, Lenfant and I, we may well do all we can to get the others reconciled in the same way. Feuillat, who's a clever fellow, will help us.'

Then, before going off, they once more referred to the water which Luc had promised to turn into the Grand-Jean rivulet. Everything was settled; and the young man

accompanied them as far as the garden, where their children Arsène and Olympe, Eugénie and Nicolas, were waiting. They had doubtless brought the little ones in order to show them that famous Crêcherie, which the whole region was talking about. And, as it happened, the pupils of the five classes had just come into the garden to play, so that it was full of turbulent gaiety. The skirts of the girls flew about in the bright sunshine, the boys bounded hither and thither like young goats, there was laughter, and singing, and shouting, a perfect florescence of childish happiness amidst the grass and the foliage.

But Luc caught sight of Sœurette, who stood scolding somebody amidst a cluster of little heads both fair and dark. In the front rank stood Nanet, now nearly ten years old, with a gay, round, bold face under a tumbled shock of hair of the hue of ripe oats, but suggesting the fleece of a young sheep. Behind him were grouped other children from five to ten years of age, the four Bonnaires—Lucien, Antoinette, Zoé, and Séverin—and the two Bourrons—Sébastien and Marthe—all of whom, no doubt, had been detected in fault. It seemed, indeed, as if Nanet had been the leader of the guilty band, for it was he who was answering Sœurette, arguing matters with her like an obstinate urchin who would never admit himself to be in the wrong.

‘What is the matter?’ Luc inquired.

‘Ah! it’s Nanet,’ Sœurette replied, ‘he has again been to the Abyss, though it is strictly forbidden. I have just learnt that he led these others there yesterday evening; and this time they even climbed over the wall.’

At the end of the Crêcherie lands, indeed, there stood a party-wall separating them from those of the Abyss. And at one corner, where Delaveau’s garden was situated, there was an old door, which since all intercourse had ceased was kept strongly bolted.

But Nanet raised his voice in protest. ‘First of all,’ said he, ‘it isn’t true that we all got over the wall. I got over by myself, and then I opened the door for the others.’

Luc, who felt greatly displeased, in his turn lost his temper. ‘You know very well,’ he exclaimed, ‘that you have been told more than a dozen times that you are not to go there. You will end by bringing on us some serious unpleasantness, and I repeat it to all of you that it is very wrong and wicked to disobey in this fashion.’

Nanet stood listening and looking with his eyes wide open. A good little fellow at bottom, but unable to appreciate the importance of his transgression, he felt moved at seeing Luc so disturbed. If he had climbed over the wall to let the others in, it was because Nise Delaveau had some playmates with her that afternoon, Paul Boisgelin, Louise Mazelle, and other amusing little *bourgeois*, and because they all wanted to play together. She was very pleasant was Nise Delaveau, according to Nanet.

'Why was it so wrong?' the boy repeated with an air of stupefaction. 'We didn't do harm to anybody, we all amused ourselves together.'

Then he named the children who had been present, and gave a truthful account of what they had done. They had only played as was allowable; they had not broken any plants, nor had they thrown the stones lying in the paths on to the flower-beds.

'Nise gets on very well with us,' he said in conclusion. 'She likes me, she told me so, and I like her since we've played together.'

Luc forced back a smile. But in his heart a vision was arising—he saw the children of the two rival classes scaling walls to fraternise, and play, and laugh together, in spite of all the hatred and warfare which separated their fathers. Would the peacefulness of the future community flower forth in them?

'It is quite possible,' said he, 'that Nise may be charming, and that you may agree very well together; only it is understood that she is to remain on her land and you on ours, in order that there may be no complaints.'

Then Sœurette, won over by all the charm of that innocent childhood, looked at him with eyes so suggestive of forgiveness that he added more gently: 'Well, you must not do it again, little ones, because you might bring some real worry on us.'

When Lenfant and Yvonnot had finally taken leave, carrying off their children, who, after mingling in the play of the others, departed very regretfully, Luc, whose daily visit was now finished, thought of going home again. But he suddenly remembered that he had promised to see Josine, and so he resolved to call on her. His morning had hitherto been a good one, and by-and-by he would be able to return home with his heart full of hope.

The house occupied by Ragu and Josine, one of the first

that had been built, stood near the park of La Crêcherie, between the houses occupied by the Bonnaires and the Bourrons. Luc was crossing the road when, at some distance, at a corner of the foot pavement, he saw a small group of women, who appeared to be busily chattering. And he soon recognised Madame Bonnaire and Madame Bourron, who were apparently giving some information to Madame Fauchard, she having come that morning, like her husband, to see if the new works were indeed such a Tom Tiddler's ground as some folk asserted. Judging by the sharp voice and harsh gestures of Madame Bonnaire—La Toupe as folks called her—it seemed evident that she was not painting a very seductive picture of the new concern. Cross-grained as she was, she could be happy nowhere, but invariably spent her time in spoiling her own life and that of others. At the very beginning she had seemed pleased to find her husband obtaining work at La Crêcherie, but after dreaming of immediately securing a big share of the profits, she was now enraged at having to wait for it, perhaps for a considerable time to come. Her great grievance, however, was that she could not even succeed in buying herself a watch, an article of which she had coveted the possession for several years already. Quite a contrast to her was Babette Bourron, who was ever in a state of delight, and did not cease extolling the advantages of her new home, her keenest satisfaction arising perhaps from the fact that her husband no longer came home drunk with Ragu. Between the two of them—La Toupe and La Bourron—Madame Fauchard, looking more emaciated, unlucky, and mournful than ever, remained in a state of some perplexity, but she was naturally inclined to favour the pessimism of La Toupe, the more particularly as she was convinced that there was no more joy for her in this life.

The sight of La Toupe and La Fauchard thus distressfully chattering was very disagreeable to Luc. It robbed him of his good humour, the more especially as he knew what a disturbance in the future organisation of work, peace, and justice was threatened by women. He felt that they were all-powerful, and it was by and for them that he would have liked to found his city. Thus his courage often failed him when he met such as were evil, hostile, or simply indifferent—women who, instead of proving a help such as he awaited, might become an obstacle, a destructive force indeed by which his labour might be annihilated. However, he passed the gossips,

lifting his hat as he did so, and they suddenly became silent and anxious, as if he had caught them doing wrong.

When he entered Ragu's house he perceived Josine seated beside a window. She had been sewing, but her work had fallen in her lap and, gazing far away, she was now plunged in so deep a reverie that she did not even hear him enter. For a moment he paused and looked at her. She was no longer the wretched girl that he had known scouring the pavements, dying of starvation, badly clad, with a pinched and woeful face under a wild tangle of hair. She was one-and-twenty now, and looked charming in her simple gown of blue linen stuff, her figure supple and slim but by no means thin. And her beautiful hair, light as silk, seemed like a delicate floescence above her rather long face with its laughing blue eyes and its little mouth as fresh as a rosebud. She seemed also to be seated in a fitting frame-work, in that gay and clean little parlour furnished with varnished deal—the room that she most preferred in the little house which she had entered so happily, and in tidying and embellishing which she had taken so much pride and pleasure for three years past.

But of what could Josine now be dreaming, with so sorrowful an expression on her pale face? When Bonnaire had prevailed on Ragu to follow him and join the others at La Crêcherie she had deemed herself saved from all future trials. Thenceforward she would have a nice little home, her daily bread would be assured, and Ragu himself, having no further worries with respect to work, would amend his ways. Luck apparently had not failed her: Ragu had even married her at the express desire of Sœurette; though truth to tell she, Josine, was by no means so pleased with the idea of that marriage as she would have been at the time when she had first met Ragu. Indeed, she had only consented to it after consulting Luc, who for her remained both God and master. And deep in her being there lurked a rapturous feeling born of the momentary hesitation which she had divined in him before he signified his approval. But after all was not that the best, and indeed the only possible, solution? She could not do otherwise than marry Ragu since he was willing. Luc had to appear pleased for her sake, retaining for her the same affection after her marriage as before it, and looking at her with a smile at each of their meetings, as if to ask her whether she were happy. But at those times she

often felt her poor heart succumbing to despair, melting with an unsatisfied craving for true affection.

As if some breath had warned her, Josine started and shivered slightly amidst her dolorous reverie. Then turning round she recognised Luc smiling at her in a gentle and anxious way.

'My dear child,' said he, 'I've come because Ragu asserts that you are very badly lodged in this house, exposed to all the winds from the plain, which, it seems, have broken three panes of your bedroom window.'

She listened, looking surprised and confused, at a loss indeed how to contradict her husband and avoid telling a lie.

'Yes, there are some panes broken, Monsieur Luc,' said she, 'but I'm not sure whether it was the wind that did it. True enough, when it blows from the plain, we get our full share of it.'

Her voice trembled as she spoke, and she was unable to restrain two big tears which rolled down her cheeks. As a matter of fact the windows had been broken by Ragu the previous evening when, in a fit of passion, he had wanted to throw everything out of doors.

'What, Josine! Are you crying? What is the matter? Come, tell me all about it. You know that I am your friend,' said Luc eagerly.

He had seated himself beside her, full of emotion, sharing her distress. But she had already wiped her tears away. 'No, no, it is nothing,' said she; 'I beg your pardon, but you've come at a bad moment, and found me unreasonable and worrying.'

Struggle as she might, however, he at last wrung a full confession from her. Ragu did not become acclimatised to that sphere of order, peacefulness, and slow and continuous effort towards a better life. He seemed to suffer from nostalgia, to regret the misery and the suffering of that wage-system amidst which he had lived, growling against the masters yet habituated to slavery, and consoling himself for it in the wine shops, where he intoxicated himself and poured forth rebellious but powerless words. He regretted the black and dirty workshops, the covert warfare waged with one's superiors, the noisy freaks with comrades, all the abominable days fraught with hatred, which one finished up by beating one's wife and children when one at last returned home.



And after beginning with jests he was ending with accusations, calling La Crêcherie a big barracks, a prison where no liberty was left one, not even that of drinking a glass too many if one felt so inclined. Besides, so far, one earned there no more than one had earned at the Abyss; and there were all sorts of worries, anxiety as to whether things were going well, and whether there might be no money for one to take when the time came round for profit-sharing. For instance, during the last two months some very bad rumours had been spreading; it was said that they would all have to tighten their waistbands that year, as a great deal of money had been expended in buying new machinery. Then again the co-operative stores often worked very badly: at times potatoes were sent you when you had asked for paraffin oil; or else you were forgotten and had to return three times to the distribution office before you could get served. For these various reasons Ragu had begun to deride the place, and grow wrathful with it, calling it a dirty hole whence he hoped to 'sling his hook,' as soon as might be possible.

Painful silence fell between Josine and Luc. The young man had become gloomy, for there was some truth beneath all those recriminations. It was the inevitable grating of new machinery at the first stage of its work. The rumours which were afloat respecting the difficulties of the current year affected Luc particularly, since he did indeed fear that he might be obliged to ask the men to make a few sacrifices in order to prevent the prosperity of the establishment from being compromised.

'And Bourron says "ditto" to Ragu, does he not?' Luc inquired of Josine. 'But you have never heard Bonnaire complain, have you?'

Josine was shaking her head, by way of answering no, when, through the open window, the breeze wafted the voices of the three women who had remained on the foot-pavement. La Toupe was again forgetting herself, carried away by her incessant desire to bark and bite. If Bonnaire remained silent, like a thoughtful man whose sensible mind admitted the necessity of an experiment of considerable duration, that wife of his sufficed to gather together all the backbiters of the rising town. As Luc glanced out of the window he saw her again frightening La Fauchard by predicting the approaching ruin of La Crêcherie.

'And so, Josine,' he slowly resumed, 'you are not happy?'

She again tried to protest: 'Oh! Monsieur Luc, why should I not be happy, when you have done so much for me?'

But her strength failed her, and again two big tears appeared in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

'You see very well, Josine, you are not happy,' repeated the young man.

'I am not happy, it's true, Monsieur Luc,' she at last answered, 'only you can do nothing in the matter. It is no fault of yours. You have been a Providence for me, and what can one do if there's nothing that can change Ragu's heart? He is becoming quite malicious again; he can no longer abide Nanet; he nearly broke everything here yesterday evening, and he struck me, because the child, so he said, answered him improperly. But leave me, Monsieur Luc—those are things which only concern me; at all events I promise you that I'll worry as little as I can.'

Sobs broke upon her trembling voice, which was scarcely audible. And he, powerless as he was, experienced increasing sadness. A shadow was cast over the whole of his happy morning; he was chilled by doubt and despair—he usually so brave, whose strength lay so much in joyous hope. Although things obeyed him, although material success seemed assured, was he to find himself powerless to change men and develop divine love, the fruitful flower of kindness and solidarity, in their hearts? If men should remain in a state of hatred and violence his work would never be accomplished. Yet how was he to awaken them to affection, how was he to teach them happiness? That dear Josine, whom he had sought in the very depths, whom he had saved from such awful misery, she to him seemed the very image of his work. That work would not really exist until she was happy. She was woman, wretched woman, the slave, the beast of burden and the toy, that he had dreamt of saving. And if she was still and ever unhappy, nothing substantial could have been founded, everything still remained to be done. Amidst his grief Luc foresaw many dolorous days; a keen perception came to him of the fact that a terrible struggle was about to open between the past and the future, and that he himself would shed in it both tears and blood.

'Do not cry, Josine,' said he; 'be brave, and I promise you that you shall be happy, for you must be happy in order that everybody may be so.'

He spoke so gently that she smiled.

'Oh! I am brave, Monsieur Luc,' she answered; 'I know very well that you won't forsake me, and that you will end by conquering, since you are so full of kindness and courage. I will wait, I promise you, even if I have to wait all my life.'

It was like an engagement, an exchange of promises instinct with hope in coming happiness. Luc rose, and as he stood there clasping both her hands he could feel the pressure of her own. And that was the only token of affection between them, the union of their hands for a few brief seconds. Ah! what a simple life of peacefulness and joy might have been lived in that little parlour, so cheerful and so clean with its furniture of varnished deal!

'*Au revoir*, Josine.'

'*Au revoir*, Monsieur Luc.'

Then Luc turned his steps homeward. And he was following the terrace, below which ran the road to Les Combettes, when a final encounter made him pause for a moment. He had just caught sight of Monsieur Jérôme, who, in his bath-chair, propelled by a man-servant, was skirting the Crêcherie lands. The sight of the old man recalled to Luc other frequent chance meetings with him, now here, now there, and particularly the first meeting of all, when he had seen him passing the Abyss and gazing with his clear eyes at the smoky and noisy pile where he had formerly founded the fortune of the Qurignons. In like fashion he was now passing La Crêcherie and gazing at its new buildings, so gay in the sunlight, with those same clear and seemingly empty eyes of his. Why had he signed to his servant to bring him so far?—was he making a complete round of the place in order to examine everything? What did he think of it then, what comparisons did he wish to establish? Perhaps, after all, this was merely some chance promenade, some mere caprice on the part of a poor old man who had lapsed into second childhood. However, whilst the servant slackened his pace, Monsieur Jérôme, grave and impassive, raised his broad and regular countenance, on either side of which fell his long white hair, and seemingly scrutinised everything, letting neither a wall nor a chimney pass without giving it a glance, as if indeed he wished to thoroughly understand that new town now springing up beside the establishment which he had formerly created.

But a fresh incident occurred, and Luc's emotion increased. Another old man, also infirm, but still able to drag himself

about on his swollen legs, was coming slowly along the road in the direction of the bath-chair. It was Daddy Lunot, corpulent, pale, and flabby, whom the Bonnaires had kept with them, and who in sunny weather took short walks past the works. At first, no doubt, he failed to recognise Monsieur Jérôme, for his sight was weak. Then, however, he started, and drew back close to the wall as if the road were not wide enough for two, and, raising his straw hat, he bent double, bowed profoundly. It was to the Qurignons' ancestor, to the master and founder, that the eldest of the Ragus, wage-earner and father of wage-earners, thus rendered homage. Years—and behind him centuries—of toil, suffering, and poverty, humbled themselves in that trembling salute. The master might be stricken, but the former slave, in whose blood coursed the cowardice of ancient servitude, became disturbed and bowed as he passed. And Monsieur Jérôme did not even see him, but passed on, staring like a stupefied idol, his gaze still and ever fixed on the new workshops of La Crêcherie, which perhaps he likewise failed to see.

Luc shuddered. What a past there was to be destroyed, what evil, deadly tares there were to pluck away! He looked at his town scarce rising from the ground, and understood what trouble, what obstacles it would encounter in growing and prospering. Love alone, and woman, and child could end by achieving victory.

## II

During the four years that La Crêcherie had been established covert hatred of Luc had been rising from Beauclair. At first there had only been so much hostile astonishment accompanied by malicious pleasantries, but since folk had been affected in their interests anger had arisen, with a furious desire to resist that public enemy by all possible weapons.

It was more particularly among the petty traders, the retail shopkeepers, that anxiety at first displayed itself. The co-operative stores of La Crêcherie, which had been regarded with derision when first inaugurated, were now proving successful, counting among their customers not only the factory hands, but also all the inhabitants who adhered to

them. As may be imagined, the old purveyors were thrown into great emotion by that terrible competition, that new tariff which in many instances meant a reduction of one third on former prices. Ruin would soon ensue if that wretched Luc were to prevail with those disastrous ideas of his, tending to a more just apportionment of wealth, and aiming in the first instance at enabling the humble ones of the world to live more comfortably and cheaply. The butchers, the grocers, the bakers, the wine dealers, would all have to put up their shutters if people were to succeed in doing without them. Thus the tradespeople shouted in chorus that it was abominable. To them society did indeed seem to be cracking and collapsing now that they could no longer levy the profits of parasites, and thereby increase the misery of the poor.

The most affected of all, however, were the Laboques, those ironmongers who, after beginning life as market hawkers, had ended by establishing something like a huge bazaar at the corner of the Rue de Brias and the Place de la Mairie. The prices for the iron of commerce had fallen considerably throughout the district since La Crêcherie had been turning out large quantities; and the worst was that with the co-operative movement now gaining upon the smaller works of the neighbourhood, a time seemed coming when consumers would procure direct at the co-operative stores, without passing through the clutches of the Laboques, such articles as Chodorge's nails, Hausser's scythes and sickles, and Mirande's agricultural appliances and tools. Apart from their output of raw iron and steel the Crêcherie stores were already supplying several of those articles, and thus the amount of business transacted by the Laboques became smaller every day. Their rage therefore knew no end; they were exasperated by what they termed that 'debasement of prices,' and regarded themselves as robbed, simply because their useless cog-wheels were no longer being allowed to consume energy and wealth with profit for nobody save themselves. Their house had thus naturally become a centre of hostility, opposition, and hatred, in which Luc's name was never mentioned otherwise than with execration. There met Dacheux the butcher, stammering forth his reactionary rage, and Caffiaux the grocer and wine-seller, who, although reeking of rancour, was of a colder temperament and weighed his own interests carefully. Even the beautiful Madame Mitaine, the

baker's wife, though inclined to agreement, came at times and lamented with the others the loss of a few of her customers.

'Do you know,' Laboque cried, 'that this Monsieur Luc, as people call him, has at bottom only one idea, that of destroying trade? Yes, he boasts of it, he shouts the monstrous words aloud: "Trade is robbery." For him we are all robbers, and we've got to disappear! It was to sweep us away that he established La Crêcherie.'

Dacheux listened with dilated eyes, and all his blood rushing to his face. 'Then how will one manage to eat and clothe oneself, and all the rest?' he asked.

'Well, he says that the consumer will apply direct to the producer.'

'And the money?' the butcher asked.

'Money? Why, he suppresses that too! There's to be no more money. Isn't it stupid, eh? As if people could live without money!'

At this Dacheux almost choked with fury. 'No more trade! no more money! Why, he wants to destroy everything. Isn't there a prison for such a bandit? He'll ruin Beauclair if we don't put a stop to it!'

But Caffiaux was gravely wagging his head. 'He says a good many more things. He says first of all that everybody ought to work—he wants to turn the world into a perfect stone-yard, where there'll be guards with staves to see that everybody does his task. He says, too, that there ought to be neither rich nor poor; according to him one will be no richer when one's born than when one dies; one will eat according to what one earns, neither more nor less, too, than one's neighbour; and one won't even have the right to save up money.'

'Well, but what about inheritances?' put in Dacheux.

'There will be no more inheritances.'

'What! no more inheritances? I shan't be able to leave my daughter my own money? Thunder! that is coming it too strong!' And thereupon the butcher banged his fist on the table with such violence that it shook.

'He says, too,' continued Caffiaux, 'that there will be no more authorities of any kind, no government, no gendarmes, no judges, no prisons. Each will live as he pleases, eat and sleep as he fancies. He says also that machinery will end by doing all the work, and that the workmen will simply have to drive it. It is to be the earthly paradise, because

there will be no more fighting, no more armies, and no more wars. And he says, moreover, that when men and women love one another they will remain together as long as they please and then bid each other good-bye in a friendly fashion, to take up with others later on if they are so inclined. And as for children, the community will take charge of them, bring them up in a heap as chance may have it, without any need of a mother's or a father's attentions.'

Beautiful Madame Mitaine, who hitherto had remained silent, now began to protest: 'Oh, the poor little ones!' said she. 'I hope that each mother will at least have the right to bring up her own. It's all very well for the children who are forsaken by their parents to be brought up pell-mell by strangers as in orphan asylums. But really it seems to me that what you have been telling us is hardly proper.'

'Say at once that it's filthy!' roared Dacheux, who was beside himself. 'Why, their famous future society will simply be a house of ill-fame!'

Then Laboque, who did not lose sight of his threatened interests, concluded: 'That Monsieur Luc is mad. We cannot let him ruin and dishonour Beauclair in this fashion! We shall have to agree together and take steps to stop it all.'

The anger increased, however, and there was a universal explosion when Beauclair learnt that the infectious disease of La Cr cherie was spreading to the neighbouring village of Les Combettes. Stupor was manifested, condemnation was passed on all sides—that Monsieur Luc was now debauching, poisoning the peasantry! After reconciling the four hundred inhabitants of the village, Lenfant, the mayor, assisted by his deputy, Yvonnot, had induced them to put their land in common by virtue of a deed of association similar to that which linked capital, talent, and work together at La Cr cherie. Henceforth there would be but one large estate, in such wise that machinery might be used, that manure might be applied on a large scale, and high cultivation practised with a view to increasing the crops tenfold and reaping large profits, which would be shared by one and all. Moreover, the two associations, that of La Cr cherie and that of Les Combettes, would mutually consolidate each other; the peasants would supply the workmen with bread, and the workmen would supply the peasants with tools and manufactured articles necessary for life, in such a way that there would be a conjunction of two inimical classes, tending by

degrees to fusion, and forming the embryo of a brotherly people. Assuredly the old world would come to an end if Socialism should win over the peasantry, the innumerable toilers of the country districts, who had hitherto been regarded as the ramparts of egotistical ownership, preferring to die of unremunerative labour on their strips of land rather than part with them. The shock of this change was felt throughout Beauclair, and a shudder passed like a warning of the coming catastrophe.

Again the Laboques were the first to be affected. They lost the custom of Les Combettes. They no longer saw Lenfant nor any of the others come to buy spades, ploughs, tools, and utensils. On the last occasion when Lenfant called he haggled and finally bought nothing, plainly declaring to them that he would gain thirty per cent. by no longer dealing with them, since they were compelled to levy such a profit on articles which they themselves procured at neighbouring works. Henceforth all the folk of Les Combettes addressed themselves direct to La Crêcherie, adhering to the co-operative stores there, which grew and grew in importance. And then terror set in among all the petty retailers of Beauclair.

'One must act, one must act!' Laboque repeated with growing violence each time that Dacheux and Caffiaux came to see him. 'If we wait till that madman has infected the whole region with his monstrous doctrines, we shall be too late.'

'But what can be done?' Caffiaux prudently inquired.

Dacheux for his part favoured brutal slaughter. 'One might wait for him one evening at a street corner and treat him to one of those hidings which give a man food for reflection.'

But Laboque, puny and cunning, dreamt of some safer means of killing his man. 'No, no, the whole town is rising against him, and we must wait for an opportunity when we shall have the whole town on our side.'

Such an opportunity did indeed arise. For centuries past old Beauclair had been traversed by a filthy rivulet, a kind of open drain, which was called the Clouque. It was not known whence it came; it seemed to flow up from under some antique hovels at the opening of the Brias gorges, and according to the common opinion it was one of those mountain torrents whose sources remain unknown. Some very old inhabitants remembered having seen it in full flood at certain



periods. But for long years already it had supplied very little water, which various industries contaminated. The housewives dwelling beside it had even ended by using it as a natural sink into which they emptied all sorts of slops, in such wise that it carried with it much of the filth of the poor district, and in summer sent forth an abominable stench. At one moment there had been serious fears of an epidemic, and the municipal council, at the mayor's initiative, had debated whether it should not be covered over. But the expense seemed too great, so the matter was shelved and the Clouque quietly continued perfuming and contaminating the neighbourhood. All at once, however, it quite ceased to flow, dried up apparently, leaving only a hard rocky bed in which there was no longer a single drop of water. As by the touch of some magician's wand Beauclair was rid of that source of infection, to which all the bad fevers of the district had been attributed. And all that remained was a feeling of curiosity as to whither the torrent might have betaken itself.

At first there were only some vague rumours on the subject. Then more precise statements were made, and it became certain that it was Monsieur Luc who had begun to divert the torrent from its usual course by capturing the springs on the slopes of the Bleuse Mountains for the needs of La Cr  cherie, whose health and prosperity came largely from its abundant supply of beautiful, clear water. But the climax had come, all the water of the torrent being diverted by Luc, when it had occurred to him to give the overplus of his reservoirs to the peasants of Les Combettes, in that way founding their fortune, and bringing about their happy association; for it was that beneficent water, flowing on for one and all, that had first united them together. Before long proofs became plentiful, the water which had disappeared from the Clouque was streaming along the Grand Jean, and turned to intelligent use, was becoming wealth instead of filth and death. Then rancour and rage arose and grew against that man Luc, who disposed so lightly of what did not belong to him. Why had he stolen the torrent? Why did he keep it and give it to his creatures? It was not right that people should in that way take the water of a town, a stream which had always flowed there, which people were accustomed to see, and which, whatever might be said to the contrary, had rendered great services. The meagre streamlet, transporting filthy detritus, exhaling pestilence

and killing people, was forgotten. Folk talked no more of burying it, each recounted what great benefit he or she had derived from it, for watering, for washing, and for the daily needs of life. Such a theft could not be tolerated; it was absolutely necessary that La Crêcherie should restore the Clouque, that filthy drain which had poisoned the town.

Naturally enough it was Laboque who shouted the loudest. He paid an official visit to Gourier, the mayor, to inquire what decision he intended to propose to the Municipal Council under such grave circumstances. He, Laboque, claimed to be particularly injured, for the Clouque had flowed behind his house, at the end of his little garden; and he alleged that he had derived considerable advantages therefrom. If he had drawn up a protest and sought to collect signatures he would undoubtedly have obtained those of all the inhabitants of his district. But, in his opinion, the town itself ought to take the affair in hand, and commence an action against La Crêcherie, claiming the restitution of the torrent, and damages for the temporary loss of it. Gourier listened, and in spite of his own hatred against Luc, contented himself with nodding approval. Finally he declared that he must have a few days to reflect, look into the matter, and consult those around him. He fully understood that Laboque was urging the town to take up the matter, in order that he might not have to do so himself. And no doubt Sub-Prefect Châtelard, whom all complications terrified and with whom Gourier shut himself up for a couple of hours, was able to convince him that it was always wise to let others embark in law-suits; for when the mayor sent for the ironmonger again, it was only to explain to him at great length that an action started by the town would drag on and lead to nothing serious, whereas one brought by a private individual would prove far more disastrous for La Crêcherie, particularly if after a first condemnation other private individuals followed suit, prolonging matters indefinitely.

A few days later Laboque issued a writ and claimed five and twenty thousand francs damages. Taking as a pretext a kind of treat offered by his son and daughter, Auguste and Eulalie, to their young friends, Honorine Caffiaux, Évariste Mitaine, and Julienne Dacheux, Laboque held quite a meeting at his house. The young folk were now fast growing up—Auguste was sixteen and Eulalie nine; Évariste, now in his fourteenth year, was already becoming serious, and

Honorine, nineteen, and thus of an age to marry, showed herself quite motherly towards little Julienne, who was but eight years old, and therefore the youngest of the party. The young people, it should be said, at once installed themselves in the strip of garden, where they played and laughed merrily, for their consciences were clear and gay, and they knew nothing of hatred and anger such as consumed their parents.

'We hold him at last!' said Laboque to his friends. 'Monsieur Gourrier told me that if we carried things to a finish we should ruin the works! Let us admit that the court only awards me ten thousand francs. Well, there are a hundred of you who can all bring similar actions, so he would have to dip in his pockets for a million! And that is not all—he will have to give us back the torrent and demolish the works he raised. That will deprive him of that fine fresh water which he is so proud of. Ah! my friends, what a good business!'

They all grew excited and triumphant at the idea of ruining the works of La Crêcherie and lowering that fellow Luc, that madman who wished to destroy trade, inheritances, money—in a word all the most venerable foundations of human society. Caffiaux alone reflected.

'I should have preferred to see an action brought by the town,' said he. 'Whenever it's a question of fighting the gentlefolk always want others to do so. Where are the hundred people who will issue writs against La Crêcherie?'

At this Dacheux exploded: 'Ah! I would willingly join in, if my house were not on the other side of the street. And even as things stand I shall see if I cannot do something, for the Clouque passes at the end of my mother-in-law's yard. Yes, thunder! I must make one of you.'

'But to begin,' resumed Laboque, 'there is Madame Mitaine, who is circumstanced exactly as I am, and whose house suffers like mine since the stream has ceased to flow. You will issue a writ, won't you, Madame Mitaine?'

He had craftily invited her that day with the express intention of compelling her to enter into a formal agreement. He knew her to be desirous of living in peace herself and of respecting the peace of others. Nevertheless he hoped to win her over.

She at first began to laugh. 'Oh! as for any harm done to my house by the disappearance of the Clouque, no, no, neighbour; the truth is that I had given orders that not a drop of that bad water was ever to be used, for I feared I

might render my customers ill. It was so dirty and it smelt so bad that whenever it is given back to us we shall have to spend the necessary money to get rid of it by making it pass underground as there was formerly a question of doing.'

Laboque pretended that he did not hear this. 'At all events, Madame Mitaine,' said he, 'you are with us, your interests are the same as ours, and if I win my suit you will act with all the other river-side people, relying on the *chose jugée*, won't you?'

'We'll see, we'll see,' replied the baker's beautiful wife, becoming grave. 'I'm willing enough to be on the side of justice, if it is just.'

Laboque had to rest content with that conditional promise. Besides, his state of excitement and rancour deprived him of all sense; he thought that victory was already won, and that he was about to crush all those socialist follies which in four years had diminished his sales by one half. It was society that he avenged by banging his fist on the table in company with Dacheux, whilst the prudent Caffiaux, before definitely committing himself, waited to see which side would triumph.

Beauclair was quite upset when it heard of Laboque's writ, and his demand for an indemnity of twenty-five thousand francs. This was indeed an ultimatum, a declaration of war. From that moment there was a rallying-point around which all the scattered hatreds grouped themselves into an army which pronounced itself vigorously against Luc and his work, that diabolical factory, where the ruin of ancient and respectable society was being forged. All Beauclair ended by belonging to this army, the injured tradesmen drew their customers together, and all the gentlefolk joined, since the new ideas quite terrified them. Indeed, there was not a petty *rentier* who did not feel himself threatened by some frightful cataclysm, in which his own narrow egotistical life would collapse. The women, too, were indignant and disgusted now that La Crêcherie was depicted to them as a huge disorderly house, the triumph of which, with its doctrine of free love, would place them at any man's mercy. Even the workmen, even the starving poor, became anxious, and began to curse the man who dreamt of saving them, but whom they accused of aggravating their misery by increasing the pitilessness of their employers and the wealthy. What distracted Beauclair more than all else, however, was a violent campaign which the local newspaper, the little sheet published by Lœbleu the printer, started

against Luc. This journal now appeared twice a week, and Captain Jollivet was suspected of being the author of the articles whose virulence was creating such a sensation. The attack, it should be said, reduced itself to a cannonade of lies and errors, all the muddy trash which is cast at Socialism by way of caricaturing its intentions and besmirching its ideal. It was, however, certain that such tactics would prove successful with poor ignorant brains, and it was curious to see how greatly the indignation spread, uniting against the disturber of the public peace all the old inimical classes, which were furious at being disturbed in their ancient cess-pool by a pretended desire to reconcile them and lead them to the just, happy, and healthy city of the future.

Two days before Laboque's action was heard in the civil court of Beauclair, the Delaveaus gave a grand lunch, with the secret object of enabling their friends to meet and arrive at an agreement prior to the battle. The Boisgelins naturally were invited, and so were Mayor Gourier, Sub-Prefect Châtelard, Judge Gaume, with his son-in-law Captain Jollivet, and finally Abbé Marle. The ladies of the various families also attended, in order that the meeting might retain all the semblance of a private pleasure party.

Châtelard that day, according to his wont, called on the mayor at half-past eleven to fetch him and his wife, the ever-beautiful Léonore. Ever since the success of La Crêcherie Gourier had been living in anxiety. He had divined that a quiver was passing through the hundreds of hands that he employed at his large boot-works in the Rue de Brias. The men were evidently influenced by the new ideas, and inclined to combine together. And he asked himself if it would not be better to yield, to help on such combination himself, for he would be ruined by it if he did not contrive to belong to it. This, however, was a worry which he kept secret, for there was another which filled him with great rancour, and made him Luc's personal enemy. His son, indeed, that tall young fellow Achille, so independent in his ways, had broken off all connection with his parents and sought employment at La Crêcherie, where he found himself near Ma-Bleue, his sweetheart of the starry nights. Gourier had forbidden any mention of that ungrateful son, who had deserted the *bourgeoisie* to join the enemies of social security. But although the mayor was unwilling to say it, his son's departure had aggravated his secret uncertainty, and brought

him a covert fear that he might some day be forced to imitate the youth's example.

'Well,' said he to Châtelard, as soon as he saw the latter enter, 'that lawsuit is at hand now. Laboque has been to see me again, as he wanted some certificates. He is still of opinion that the town ought to intervene, and it is really difficult to refuse him a helping hand after egging him on as we did.'

The sub-prefect contented himself with smiling. 'No, no, my friend,' he answered, 'believe me, don't involve the town in it. You were sensible enough to yield to my reasoning, you refused to take proceedings, and you allowed that terrible Laboque, who thirsts for vengeance and massacre, to act by himself. That was fitting, and, I beg you, persevere in that course, remain simply a spectator; there will always be time to profit by Laboque's victory if he should be victorious. Ah! my friend, if you only knew what advantages one derives by meddling in nothing!'

Then by a gesture he expressed all that he had in his mind, the peace that he enjoyed in that sub-prefecture of his since he allowed himself to be forgotten there. Things were going from bad to worse in Paris, the central authorities were collapsing a little more each day, and the time was near when *bourgeoise* society would either crumble to pieces or be swept away by a revolution. He, like a sceptical philosopher, only asked that he might endure till then, and finish his life happily in the warm little nest which he had chosen. His whole policy therefore consisted in letting things go, in meddling with them as little as possible; and he was convinced that the Government, amidst the difficulties of its last days, was extremely grateful to him for abandoning the beast to its death without creating any further worries. A sub-prefect whom one never heard of, who by his intelligence had effaced Beauclair from the number of governmental cares, was indeed a precious functionary. Thus Châtelard got on extremely well; his superiors only remembered him to cover him with praises, whilst he quietly finished burying the old social system, spending the autumn of his own days at the feet of the beautiful Léonore.

'You hear, my friend,' he continued, 'don't compromise yourself, for in such times as ours one never knows what may happen on the morrow. One must be prepared for everything, and the best course therefore is to include oneself with

nothing. Let the others run on ahead and take all the risk of getting their bones broken. You will see very well afterwards what you ought to do.'

However, Léonore now came into the room, gowned in light silk. Since she had passed her fortieth year she had been looking younger than ever, with her blonde majestic beauty and her candid eyes. Châtelard, as gallant now as on the very first day, took her hand and kissed it, whilst the husband with an air of relief glanced at the pair affectionately.

'Ah! you are ready,' said he. 'We will start then—eh, Châtelard? And be easy, I am prudent, and have no desire to thrust myself into any turmoil, which would destroy our peace and quietness. But by-and-by, at Delaveau's, you know, it will be necessary to say like the others.'

At that same hour Judge Gaume was waiting at home for his daughter Lucile and his son-in-law Jollivet, who were to fetch him in order that they might all repair to the lunch together. During the last four years the judge had greatly aged. He seemed to have become yet more severe, and sadder; and he carried strict attention to the letter of the law to the point of mania, drawing up the preambles of his judgments with increasing minuteness of detail. It was said that he had been heard sobbing on certain evenings, as if he felt everything connected with his life giving way, even that human justice to which he clung so despairingly as to a last piece of wreckage which might save him from sinking. Amidst his dolorous remembrance of the tragedy which weighed upon his life—his wife's betrayal and violent death—he must above all else have suffered at seeing that drama begin afresh with his daughter Lucile, of whom he was so fond, and who was so virginal of countenance, and so strikingly like her mother. She in her turn was now deceiving her husband. Indeed, she had not been married six months to Captain Jollivet before she had taken a lover, a solicitor's petty clerk, a tall fair youth with blue girlish eyes, younger than herself. The judge having surprised the intrigue, suffered from it as if it were a renewal of that betrayal which had left an ever-bleeding wound in his heart. He recoiled from a painful explanation, which would have brought him perchance a repetition of the awful day when his wife had killed herself before his eyes after confessing her fault. But how abominable was that world in which all that he had loved had betrayed and failed him! And how could one believe in any human justice when

it was the most beautiful and the best who made one suffer so cruelly!

Thoughtful and morose, Judge Gaume was seated in his private room, where he had just finished reading the 'Journal de Beauclair,' when the Captain and Lucile made their appearance. The violent article against La Crêcherie which he had just read seemed to him foolish, clumsy, and vulgar. And he quietly expressed his opinion to that effect.

'It is not you, I hope, my good Jollivet, who write such articles, as is rumoured. No good purpose is served by insulting one's adversaries,' he said.

The Captain made a gesture of embarrassment: 'Oh, write!' he retorted, 'you know very well that I don't write, it is not to my taste. But it's true that I give Lebleu some ideas, some notes, you know, on scraps of paper, and he gets somebody or other to write articles based on them.' Then, as the judge still pursed his lips disapprovingly, the captain went on: 'What else can one do? One fights with such weapons as one has. If those cursed Madagascar fevers had not compelled me to send in my papers, I should have fallen sabre and not pen in hand on those idealogues who are demolishing everything with their criminal utopian schemes. Ah! yes indeed, it would relieve me to be able to bleed a dozen of them!'

Lucile, short and *mignonne*, had hitherto remained silent, with her usual keen enigmatical smile upon her lips. But now she turned so plainly ironical a glance upon her husband, that great man with the victorious moustaches, that the judge easily detected in it all the merry disdain she felt for a swashbuckler whom her little hands toyed with as a cat may toy with a mouse.

'Oh, Charles!' said she, 'don't be wicked, don't say things that frighten me!'

But just then she met her father's glance, and feared lest her true feelings should be divined; so putting on her candid, virginal air again, she added: 'Isn't it wrong of Charles to get so heated, father dear? We ought to live quietly in our little corner.'

But Gaume detected that she was still jeering. 'It is all very sad and very cruel,' said he by way of conclusion, virtually speaking to himself. 'What can one decide, what can one do when all deceive and devour one another?'

He rose painfully, and took his hat and gloves in order to



go to Delaveau's. Then in spite of everything, when once he was in the street, and Lucile—of whom he was so fond, whatever the sufferings she caused him—took hold of his arm, he enjoyed a moment of delightful forgetfulness as after a lovers' quarrel.

Meantime, when noon struck at the Abyss, Delaveau joined Fernande in the little *salon* opening into the dining-room of the pavilion built by the Qurignons, which was now the home of the manager of the works. It was a rather small dwelling; for, apart from the dining and drawing rooms and the domestic offices, the ground floor only contained one other apartment, which Delaveau had made his private room, and which communicated by a wooden gallery with the general offices of the works. Then on the first and second floors were some bed-rooms. Since a young woman passionately fond of luxury had been living in the house, carpets and hangings had imparted to the old floors and dark walls some little of the splendour that she dreamt of.

Boisgelin was the first guest to arrive, and came unaccompanied.

'What!' exclaimed Fernande, as if greatly distressed, 'is not Suzanne with you?'

'She begs you to excuse her,' Boisgelin replied in very correct fashion. 'She woke up this morning with a sick headache, and has been unable to leave her room.'

Each time that there was any question of going to the Abyss matters took this course—Suzanne found some pretext for avoiding such an aggravation of her grief, and only Delaveau, in his blindness, failed to understand the truth.

Moreover, Boisgelin immediately changed the conversation. 'Ah! so here we are on the eve of the famous law-suit,' said he. 'It is as good as settled, eh? La Crêcherie will be condemned!'

Delaveau shrugged his broad shoulders. 'What does it matter to us whether it be condemned or not?' he replied. 'It does us harm, no doubt, by lowering the price of metal, but we don't compete in manufactured articles, and there is nothing very serious as yet.'

Fernande, who looked wondrously beautiful that day, stood quivering, gazing at her husband with flaming eyes. 'Oh! you don't know how to hate!' she cried. 'What! that man set himself to thwart all your plans, founded at your very door a rival enterprise, the success of which would be the ruin of

the one you manage—a man, too, who never ceases to be an obstacle and a threat—and you don't even desire to see him crushed! Ah! if he's flung naked into a ditch I shall be only too pleased!

From the very first day she had felt that Luc would be the enemy, and she could not speak calmly of that man who threatened her enjoyment of life. Therein for her lay his one great unique crime. With her ever-increasing appetite for pleasure and luxury, she required ever larger profits, an abundance of prosperity for the works, hundreds and hundreds of workmen, kneading, fashioning steel at the flaming doors of their furnaces. She was the devourer of men and money, the one whose cravings the Abyss with its steam hammers and its huge machinery no longer sufficed to satisfy. And what would become of her hopes of future pomp and vanity, of millions amassed and devoured, if the Abyss should fall into difficulties, and succumb to competition? With that thought in her mind, she left neither her husband nor Boisgelin any rest, but ever urged them on, worried them incessantly, seizing every opportunity to give expression to her anger and her fears.

Boisgelin, who feigned a superior kind of way—never meddling with business matters, but spending the profits of the works without counting them, setting his only glory in being a handsome ladykiller, an elegant horseman, and a great sportsman—was none the less accustomed to shiver when he heard Fernande speak of possible ruin. Thus, on the present occasion, turning towards Delaveau, in whom he retained absolute confidence, he inquired, 'You have no anxiety, eh, cousin? All is going on well here?'

The engineer again shrugged his shoulders. 'I repeat that the works are in no wise affected as yet. Moreover, the whole town is rising against that man—he is mad. We shall all see now how unpopular he is; and if at bottom I am well pleased with that law-suit, it is because it will finish him off in the opinion of Beauclair. Before three months have elapsed all the workmen that he has taken from us will be coming with hands clasped to beg me to take them back. You will see, you will see! Authority is the only sound principle, the enfranchisement of labour is arrant stupidity, for the workman no longer does anything properly when once he becomes his own master.'

Silence fell, then he added more slowly, with a faint shade

of anxiety in his eyes, 'All the same, we ought to be prudent. La Crêcherie is not a competitor that one can neglect, and what would alarm me would be any lack of the necessary funds for a struggle in some sudden emergency. We live too much from day to day, and it is becoming indispensable that we should establish a substantial reserve fund, by setting apart, for instance, one third of the annual profits.'

Fernande restrained a gesture of involuntary protest. That was indeed her fear: that her lover might have to reduce his expenditure, and that she, in her pride and pleasures, might suffer therefrom. She had to content herself for the moment with looking at Boisgelin. But he, of his own accord, plainly answered: 'No, no, cousin, not at the present moment. I can't set anything aside, my expenses are too heavy. At the same time I must thank you once more, for you make my money yield even more than you promised. We will see about the rest later on—we will talk it over.'

Nevertheless Fernande remained in a nervous state, and her covert anger fell upon Nise, who had just lunched alone, under the supervision of a maid, who now brought her into the *salon* before taking her to spend the afternoon with a little friend. Nise, who was now nearly seven years old, was growing quite pretty, pink and fair, and ever merry, with wild hair which made her resemble a little curly sheep.

'There, my dear Boisgelin,' said Fernande, 'there's a disobedient child who will end by making me quite ill. Just ask her what she did the other day at that treat which she offered to your son Paul and little Louise Mazelle!'

Without evincing the slightest alarm, Nise, with her limpid blue eyes, continued gaily smiling at those about her.

'Oh!' continued her mother, 'she won't admit any wrong-doing. But do you know, although I had forbidden it a dozen times, she again opened the old door in our garden wall to admit all the dirty urchins of La Crêcherie into our grounds. There was that little Nanet, a frightful little rascal for whom she has conceived an affection. And your boy Paul was mixed up in it, and so was Louise Mazelle, all of them fraternising with the children of that man Bonnaire, who left us in such an insolent fashion. Yes, Paul with Antoinette, and Louise with Lucien, and Mademoiselle Nise and her Nanet, leading them to the assault of our

flower-beds. Yet she has not even a blush of shame on her cheeks, you see !

“It isn't just,” Nise simply answered in her clear voice ; ‘we did not break anything, we played together very nicely. He is funny, is Nanet.’

This answer made Fernande quite angry : ‘Ah ! you think him funny, do you ? Just listen to me. If ever I catch you with him, you shall have no dessert for a week. I don't want you to get me into any unpleasantness with those people near us. They would go about everywhere saying that we attract their children here in order to render them ill. You hear me ? This time it is serious ; you will have to deal with me if you see Nanet again.’

‘Yes, mamma,’ said Nise in her quiet, smiling way. And when she had gone off with the maid, after kissing everybody, the mother concluded : ‘It is very simple—I shall have the door walled up. In that way I shall be certain that the children won't communicate. There is nothing worse than that—it corrupts them.’

Neither Delaveau nor Boisgelin had intervened ; for on the one hand they saw in this affair only so much childishness, and on the other they approved of severe measures when good order was in question. But the future was germinating. Stubborn Mademoiselle Nise had carried away in her little heart the thought of Nanet, who was funny and played so nicely.

At last the guests arrived, the Gouriers with Châtelard, then Judge Gaume with the Jollivets. Abbé Marle was the last to appear, late according to his wont. Though the Mazelles had expressly promised to come and take coffee, some obstacle prevented them from sharing the repast. Thus there were only ten at table ; but then they had desired to be few in number in order that they might be able to chat at their ease. Besides, the dining-room, of which Fernande felt ashamed, was such a small one that the old mahogany sideboard interfered with the service whenever there were more than a dozen round the table.

From the serving of the fish, some delicious trout of the Mionne, the conversation naturally fell on La Crêcherie and Luc. And what was said by those educated *bourgeois*, in a position to know the truth about what they called ‘socialist utopia,’ proved scarcely one whit more sensible or intelligent than the extraordinary views expressed by such people as

Dacheux and Laboquer. The only man who might have understood the real position was Châtelard. But then he preferred to jest.

'You know,' said he, 'that the boys and girls there grow up all together in the same class-rooms and workshops, so that we may expect the little town to become a populous one, very rapidly. With their loose theories, they will all be papas and mammas, and there will be quite a tribe of children running about?'

'How horrible!' exclaimed Fernande, with an air of profound disgust, for she affected extreme prudishness.

Then, for a few moments, the free love theories attributed to the denizens of La Crèche formed the topic of conversation. But a matter of that kind did not worry Delaveau. In his estimation the serious point was the undermining of authority, the criminal dream of living without a master.

'Such a conception as that is beyond me,' he exclaimed. 'How will their future city be governed? To speak only of the works, they say that by association they will suppress the wage system, and that there will be a just division of wealth when only workers are left, each giving his share of toil to the community. But I can conceive of no more dangerous dream than that, for it is irrealisable, is it not, Monsieur Gourier?'

The mayor, who was eating with his face bent over his plate, spent some time in wiping his mouth before he answered, for he noticed that the sub-prefect was looking at him.

'Irrealisable, no doubt,' he said at last. 'Only one must not lightly condemn the principle of association. There is great strength in association, and we ourselves may be called upon to make use of it.'

This prudent reply incensed the captain, who retorted angrily, 'What! wouldn't you condemn once and for all the execrable deeds which that man—I speak of that Monsieur Luc—is planning against all that we love, that old France of ours, such as the swords of our fathers made it and bequeathed it to us?'

Some mutton cutlets served with asparagus heads were now being handed round, and a general outcry against Luc arose. The mention of his hated name sufficed to draw them all together, unite them closely, in alarm for their threatened interests, and with an imperious craving for resistance and revenge. Somebody, however, was cruel enough to ask

Gourier for news of his son, Achille the renegade, and the mayor had to curse the lad once again. Châtelard alone tried to tack about and keep the discussion on a jocular footing. But in this he failed, for the captain continued prophesying the worst disasters if the factious-minded were not immediately kicked into obedience and order. And his words disseminated such a panic that Boisgelin, becoming anxious again, appealed to Delaveau, from whom there happily came a reassuring declaration.

‘Our man is already hit,’ declared the manager of the Abyss. ‘The prosperity of La Crêcherie is only on the surface, and an accident would suffice to bring everything to the ground. Thus, for instance, my wife was lately giving me some particulars——’

‘Yes,’ broke in Fernande, happy to have an opportunity of relieving her feelings, ‘the information came to me from my laundress. She knows one of our former hands, a man named Ragu, who left us in order to go to the new works. Well, it seems that Ragu is declaring everywhere that he has had quite enough of that dirty den, that the men are bored to death there, that he isn’t the only one to complain, and that one of these fine days they will all be coming back here. Ah ! who will begin, who will deal the blow necessary to make that man Luc totter and fall to pieces ?’

‘But there’s the Laboque lawsuit,’ said Boisgelin, coming to the young woman’s help. ‘I hope that will suffice for everything.’

Fresh silence ensued whilst some roast ducks made their appearance. Although the Laboque lawsuit was the real motive of that friendly gathering, nobody as yet had dared to speak of it in presence of the silence which Judge Gaume preserved. He ate but little, his secret sorrows having brought him a complaint of the digestive organs, and he contented himself with listening to the others and gazing at them with his cold grey eyes, whence he knew how to withdraw all expression. Never had he been seen in a less communicative mood, and this ended by embarrassing the others, who would have liked to know on what footing to treat him, and at least have some certainty as to the judgment which he would deliver. Although no thought of possible acquittal at his hands entered anybody’s mind, they all hoped that he would have the good taste to pledge himself in a sufficiently clear fashion.

Again it was the captain who advanced to the assault. 'The law is formal, is it not, Monsieur le Président?' he inquired. 'All damage done to anybody must be repaired?'

'No doubt,' answered Gaume.

More was expected from him, but he relapsed into silence. And thereupon, by way of compelling him to pledge himself more thoroughly, the Clouque affair was noisily discussed. That filthy stream became one of the former adornments of Beauclair; it was not right that people should steal a town's water in such a fashion as that man Luc had done, particularly to give it to peasants whose brains had been turned to such a point that they had converted their village into a hot-bed of furious anarchy which threatened the whole region. All the terror of the *bourgeoisie* now became apparent, for assuredly the ancient and holy principle of property was in sore distress if the sons of the hard-fisted peasants of former times had reached such a point as to place their strips of land in common. It was high time that justice should interfere and put a stop to such a scandal.

'Oh! we may be quite easy,' Boisgelin ended by saying in a flattering tone. 'The cause of society will be in good hands. There is nothing above a just judgment, rendered in all liberty by an honest conscience.'

'Without doubt,' Gaume simply repeated.

And this time it was necessary to rest content with that vague remark, in which they all strove to detect the certainty of Luc's conviction. The meal was now virtually over, for after a Russian salad there were only some strawberry ices and the dessert. But the guests' stomachs were comforted, and they laughed a good deal, for they were convinced of victory. When they had gone into the *salon* to take coffee and the Mazelles arrived, the latter were, as usual, greeted with somewhat jocular friendliness. Those worthy folk, living on their income, and personifying the delights of idleness, moved one's heart! Madame Mazelle's complaint was no better, but she was delighted at having obtained from Doctor Novarre some new wafers which enabled her to eat anything with impunity. It was only such matters as the abominable stories of La Cr  cherie, the threat that Rentes would be done away with, and that the right of inheritance would be abolished, that now gave her a turn. But what was the use of talking about disagreeable things? Mazelle, who watched over his wife with profound satisfaction, winked at the others and

begged them to raise those horrid subjects no more, since they had such a bad effect on Madame Mazelle's failing health. And then the gathering became delightful, they all hastened to revert to the happiness of life, a life of wealth and enjoyment, of which they plucked all the flowers.

At last, amidst growing anger and hatred, the day of the famous lawsuit dawned. Never had Beauclair been so upset by furious passion. Luc in the first instance had felt astonished at Laboque's writ, and had simply laughed at it, particularly as it seemed to him impossible that the claim for twenty-five thousand francs by way of damages could be sustained. If the Clouque had dried up it would in the first place be difficult for anybody to prove that this had been caused by the capturing of hillside springs at La Crêcherie; and moreover those springs belonged to the estate, to the Jordans, and were free from all servitude, in such wise that the owner had a full right to dispose of them as he pleased. On the other hand Laboque must assuredly base his claim for damages on facts proving that he had really sustained injury and loss, but he simply made such a feeble and clumsy attempt to do so that no court of justice in the world could possibly decide in his favour. As Luc jocularly put it, it was he who ought to have claimed a public grant as a reward for having delivered the waterside land-owners from a source of infection, of which they had long complained. The town now simply had to fill up the bed of the stream and sell the land for building purposes, thereby putting a few hundred thousand francs into its coffers. Thus Luc laughed, not imagining that such a lawsuit as Laboque's could be at all serious. It was only afterwards, on finding rancour and hostility rising against him on every side, that he began to realise the gravity of the situation, and the peril in which his work would be placed.

This was a first painful shock for him. He was not ignorant of the maliciousness of man. In giving battle to the old world, he had fully expected that the latter would not yield him place without anger and resistance. He was prepared for the Calvary he foresaw, the stones and mud with which the ungrateful multitude usually pelt precursors. Yet his heart wavered as he realised the approach of folly, cruelty, and betrayal. He understood that behind the Laboques and the other petty traders there was the whole *bourgeoisie*, all who possess and are unwilling to part with aught of their possessions. His attempts at association and co-operation



placed capitalist society, based on the wage-earning system, in such peril that he became for it a public enemy, of which it must rid itself at any cost. And it was the Abyss and La Guerdache and the whole town and authority in every form that were now bestirring themselves, joining in the struggle and striving to crush him. If he felt that pack of wolves would rush upon him and devour him. He knew the names of those enemies, functionaries, traders, mere *rentiers* with placid faces who would have eaten him alive had they seen him fall at a street corner. And therefore, mastering his distress of heart, he prepared for battle, full of the conviction that one can found nothing without battling, and that all great human work is sealed with human blood.

It was on a Tuesday, a market day, that Laboque's action was heard by the civil court, over which Judge Gaume presided. Beauclair was in a state of uproar, all the folk who had come in from the neighbouring villages helped to increase the general feverishness on the Place de la Mairie and in the Rue de Brias. Sœurette, who felt anxious, had therefore begged Luc to ask a few strong friends to accompany him. But he stubbornly refused to do so, he resolved to go to the court alone, just as he had resolved to defend himself in person, having engaged an advocate simply as a matter of form. When he entered the court-room, which was small and already crowded with noisy people, silence suddenly fell, and the eager curiosity which greets an isolated, unarmed victim ready for sacrifice became manifest. Luc's quiet courage increased the rage of his enemies, who pronounced his demeanour to be insolent. He remained standing in front of the bench allotted to defendants, and whilst quietly gazing at the closely packed people around him, he recognised Laboque, Dacheux, Caffiaux, and other shopkeepers among all the many furious enemies with ardent faces, whom he saw for the first time. However, he felt a little relieved on finding that the intimates of La Guerdache and the Abyss had at least had the good taste to refrain from coming to see him delivered to the beasts.

Long and exciting proceedings were anticipated, but there was nothing of the kind. Laboque has chosen one of those provincial advocates with a reputation for maliciousness who are the terror of a region. And, indeed, the best time which Luc's enemies spent was when this man spoke. Knowing how flimsy were the legal grounds on which the demand for damages was based, he contented himself with ridiculing the

reforms attempted at La Crêcherie. He made his hearers laugh a good deal with the comical and distorted picture which he drew of the proposed future society. And he raised general indignation when he pictured the children of both sexes being corrupted, the holy institution of marriage being abolished, and free love and all such horrors taking its place. Nevertheless, the general opinion was that he had not found the supreme insult or argument, the bludgeon blow by which a suit is gained and a man for ever crushed. And so great, therefore, became the anxiety that when Luc in his turn spoke, his slightest words were greeted with murmurs. He spoke very simply, refrained from replying to the attacks made upon his enterprise, and contented himself with showing with decisive force that Laboque's demands were ill-founded. Would he not rather have rendered a service to Beauclair if he had, indeed, dried up that pestilential Clouque, and presented the town with good building land? It was not even proved, however, that the works carried out at La Crêcherie had caused the disappearance of the torrent, and he was waiting for the other side to give proof of it. When he concluded, some of his bitterness of heart appeared, for he declared that if he desired nobody's thanks for whatever useful work he might have done, he would be happy if people would but allow him to pursue his enterprises in peace, without seeking groundless quarrels with him. On several occasions Judge Gaume had to enjoin silence on the audience; nevertheless when the public prosecutor also had spoken, in a designedly confused manner, in turn praising and condemning both parties, Laboque's advocate replied in so violent a fashion, calling Luc an Anarchist bent on destroying the town, that loud acclamations burst forth, and the judge had to threaten that he would order the court to be cleared if such demonstrations were renewed. Then he postponed judgment for a fortnight.

When that fortnight was past, the popular passions had become yet more heated, and folk almost came to blows on the market-place in discussing the probable terms of the judgment. Nearly everybody, however, was convinced that it would be a severe one, fixing the damages at ten or fifteen thousand francs, and ordering the defendant to restore the Clouque to its former condition. At the same time some people wagged their heads and felt sure of nothing, for they had not been satisfied with Judge Gaume's demeanour in court. Anxiety was caused, too, by the manner in which the

judge had shut himself up at home on the morrow of the hearing, under the pretence of suffering from some indisposition. It was said that he was really in perfect health, and had simply desired to place himself beyond any pressure, refusing to see people lest they might try to influence his judicial conscience. What did he do in that silent house of his, whose doors and windows were kept strictly closed, and which his daughter even was not allowed to enter? To what moral struggle, what internal drama had he fallen a prey amidst his wrecked life, the collapse of all that he had loved and all that he had believed in? Those were questions which occupied many people, but which none could answer.

Judgment was to be delivered at noon at the outset of the court's sitting. And the room was yet more crowded and excited than on the former occasion. Laughter rang out, and words of hope and violence were exchanged from one to the other end. All Luc's enemies had come to see him annihilated. And he had again refused to let anybody accompany him, preferring to present himself alone, the better to express the peacefulness of his mission. He stood up smiling and looking around him without even appearing to suspect that all that growling anger was directed against himself. At last, punctual to the minute, Judge Gaume came in, followed by his two assessors and the public prosecutor. There was no need for the usher to command silence, the chatter suddenly ceased, and the faces of one and all were stretched forward, aglow with anxious curiosity. The judge had in the first instance seated himself, then he rose holding the paper on which his judgment was written; and for a moment he remained thus, motionless and silent, with his eyes gazing far away beyond the crowd. At last, slowly and without the faintest emphasis, he began to read his judgment. It was a long business, for 'whereas' followed 'whereas' with monotonous regularity, presenting the various questions submitted to the court in full detail and under every possible aspect. The people present listened without understanding much of what was read, and without managing to foresee the conclusion, so incessantly and closely did arguments on either side follow one another. It seemed, however, at each forward step that Luc's contentions were adopted by the court, that no real damage had been done to another, and that every landowner had a right to execute what work he pleased on his own land when no servitude existed to restrain him. And the decision

at last burst forth—Luc was acquitted, the action was dismissed.

At first a moment of stupefaction ensued in the court-room. Then, everybody having understood the position, there came hooting and violent threatening shouts. What! the excited crowd, maddened by lies for months past, was robbed of its promised victim! It demanded that victim, it claimed him that it might tear him to pieces, since an attempt to rob it of him was made at the last moment by a judge who had evidently sold himself. Was not Luc the public enemy, the stranger who had come nobody knew whence to corrupt Beauclair, ruin its trade, and foment civil war in its midst by banding the workmen together against their masters? And had he not with diabolical wickedness stolen the town's water, dried up a stream whose disappearance was a disaster for all who had property near its banks? The 'Journal de Beauclair' had repeated those accusations every week, all the authorities, all the gentlefolk had spread them abroad, and now the humbler ones, blinded and enraged, convinced that a pestilence would come from La Crêcherie, 'saw red' and demanded death. Fists were thrust forward, and the cries increased:

'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner, to death with him!'

Very pale, with his features rigid, Judge Gaume remained standing amidst the uproar. He wished to speak and give orders for the court to be cleared, but he had to renounce all hope of making himself heard. And for dignity's sake he had to rest content with suspending the sitting by withdrawing from the court followed by his two assessors and the public prosecutor.

Luc had remained calm and smiling beside his bench. He had been as much surprised as his adversaries by the tenor of the judgment, for he knew in what a vitiated atmosphere the judge lived. It was comforting to meet a just man amid so much human baseness. When, however, the cries of death burst forth, Luc's smile became a sad one, and his heart filled with bitterness as he turned towards that howling throng. What had he done to those petty *bourgeois*, those tradesmen, those workmen? Had he not desired to benefit all, was he not working in order that all might become happy, loving, and brotherly? But the fists still threatened him, and the shouts lashed him more violently than ever:

'To death! to death with the thief! To death with the poisoner!'

To see those poor folk so wild, maddened by falsehoods, caused Luc profound grief, for he loved them in spite of everything. He restrained his tears, for he wished to remain erect, proud, and courageous beneath those insults. The public thinking itself braved, would have ended, however, by breaking down the oaken partitions in order to get at him, if some guards had not at last succeeded in thrusting him out of the court-room and securing the doors. Then, on behalf of Judge Gaume, the clerk of the court came to beg Luc to refrain from leaving immediately, for fear of some accident; and eventually the clerk prevailed on him to wait a few minutes in the room of the doorkeeper of the Palace of Justice, whilst the crowd was dispersing.\*

But if Luc consented to do this he none the less experienced a feeling of shame and revolt at being obliged to hide himself. He spent in that doorkeeper's room the most painful fifteen minutes of his life, for he thought it cowardly not to face the crowd, and was indignant that the position of an apparent culprit should thus be forced upon him. Directly the approaches of the Palace of Justice had been cleared, he insisted on going home, on foot, and unaccompanied by anybody. He had merely a light walking-stick with him, and was even sorry that he had brought it, for fear lest anybody should imagine that he had done so for purposes of defence. He had all Beauclair to cross, and he set out slowly and quietly along the streets. Until he reached the Place de la Mairie nobody seemed to notice him. The people who had quitted the court had waited for him for a few minutes; then feeling certain that he would not venture out for some hours, they had gone off to spread the news of the acquittal through the town. But on the Place de la Mairie, where the market was being held, Luc was recognised. He was pointed out and a few persons even began to follow him, not as yet with evil intentions, but solely to see what might happen. There were only some peasants and their customers present, mere sight-seers who were not mixed up in the quarrel. Thus matters only took a serious turn when the young man turned into the

\* All who remember M. Zola's trial in Paris in connection with the Dreyfus case will recognise that the above passages and others in this chapter are in part founded on his personal experiences at the time referred to.—*Trans.*

Rue de Brias, at the corner of which, in front of his shop, Laboque, infuriated by his defeat, was venting his anger amidst a small crowd of people.

All the tradespeople of the neighbourhood had hastened to Laboque's establishment directly they had heard the disastrous tidings. What! was it true then? La Crêcherie would be free to finish ruining them with its co-operative stores, since the judges took its part? Caffiaux, who looked overwhelmed, preserved silence, full of thoughts which he would not express. But Dacheux the butcher, with all his blood rushing to his face, showed himself one of the most violent, eager to defend his meat, sacred meat, meat the privileged food of the wealthy! And he even talked of killing people rather than reduce his prices by a single centime. Madame Mitaine, for her part, had not come. She had never been in favour of the lawsuit, and she simply declared that she should go on selling bread as long as she found buyers, and that, for the rest, she would see afterwards. Laboque, however, boiling over with fury, was for the tenth time recounting the abominable treachery of Judge Gaume when all at once he perceived Luc quietly walking past his shop—that ironmongery shop whose ruin he was consummating. Such audacity brought Laboque's rage to a climax; and he almost threw himself on the young man as, half stifled by his rising bile, he growled, 'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner!'

Luc, without pausing, contented himself with turning his calm brave eyes on the tumultuous throng whence came Laboque's husky invectives. This was taken by all as an act of provocation, and a general clamour arose, gathered force, and became like a tempest blast. 'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!'

Luc meantime, as if he himself were not in question, quietly went his way, glancing to right and left, like one who is interested in the sights of the streets. But almost the whole band had begun to follow him with louder and louder hoots, and threats, and the outrageous words, 'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!'

And those shouts never ceased, but grew and spread as he went at a leisurely pace up the Rue de Brias. Out of each shop came fresh tradespeople to join the demonstration. Women showed themselves in the doorways and hooted the young man as he passed. Some in their exasperation even

rushed up and shouted with the men: 'To death with the thief and poisoner!' Luc saw one of them, a fair young woman, a fruiterer's wife, charmingly beautiful, showing her fine white teeth as she shouted insults after him, and threatening him with her hands, whose rosy finger-nails seemed eager to tear him to pieces. Children also had begun to run after him, and there was one, some five or six years old, no bigger than a jack-boot, who almost threw himself between the young man's legs in order that he might be the better heard: 'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner!' Poor little urchin! Who could have already taught him to raise that shout of hatred? But matters became worse when Luc passed the factories situated in the upper part of the street. The workgirls of Gourier's boot manufactory appeared at their windows, clapped their hands and howled. Then there were even the workmen of the Chodorge and Mirande factories, who stood smoking on the foot-pavement waiting for the bells to ring the close of the dinner-hour, and who, brutified by servitude, likewise joined in the demonstration. One thin little fellow, with carrotty hair and big blurred eyes, seemed stricken with insanity, so furiously did he rush about, shouting louder than all the others: 'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!'

Ah! that ascent of the Rue de Brias, with that growing band of enemies at his heels, amidst that ignoble torrent of threats and insults! Luc remembered the evening of his arrival at Beauclair four years previously, when the black tramp, tramp of the disinherited starvelings along that same street had filled him with such active compassion that he had vowed to devote his life to the salvation of the wretched. What had he done for four years past, that so much hatred should have sprung up against him? He had made himself the apostle of the morrow, the apostle of a community all solidarity and brotherliness, organised by the ennoblement of work—work, the regulator of human wealth. He had given an example of what he desired to establish, at that La Crêcherie where the future city was germinating, and where such additional justice and happiness as was for the time possible already reigned. And that had sufficed—the whole town regarded him as a malefactor; for he could feel that the whole of it was behind the band now barking at his heels. How bitter was the suffering that accompanied that Calvary—

ascent, which all just men must make amidst the blows of the very beings whose redemption they seek to hasten! Yet as for those *bourgeois* whose quiet digestions he troubled, Luc excused them for hating him; for were they not terrified by the thought of having to share their now egotistical enjoyment with others? He also excused those shopkeepers who ascribed their ruin to his malice, when he simply dreamt of a better employment of social forces, and of preventing all useless waste of the public fortune. And he even excused those workmen whom he had come to save from misery, and for whom he was so laboriously raising a city of justice, yet who hooted and insulted him, to such a degree, indeed, had their brains been fogged and their hearts chilled. Only if he excused them all, in his sorrowful brotherliness, he bled, indeed, at finding, amongst the most insulting, those very toilers of factory and workshop whom he desired to make the nobles, the free and happy men of to-morrow.

Luc was still ascending that endless Rue de Brias, and the pack of wolves was still increasing in numbers, their shouts knowing no cessation: 'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!'

For a moment he paused, turned, and looked at all those people in order that they might not imagine that he was fleeing. And as there happened to be some piles of stones thereabouts, one man stooped down, took up a stone and flung it at him. Immediately afterwards others stooped, and the stones began to rain upon him amidst ever-growing threats.

'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!'

So now he was being stoned. However, he made not a gesture even, but resumed his walk, persevering in the ascent of his Calvary. His hands were empty, he had with him no weapon save his light walking-stick, and this he had slipped under his arm. But he remained very calm, full of the idea that if he were destined to fulfil his mission it would render him invulnerable. His grief-stricken heart alone suffered, cruelly rent as it was by the sight of so much error and madness. Tears rose to his eyes, and he had to make a great effort to prevent them from flowing down his cheeks.

'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!' Still and ever did those cries resound.

A stone at last struck one of Luc's heels, then another



grazed his hip. It had become a game now—the very children took part in it. But they were unskilful, and most of the stones rebounded over the ground. Twice, however, did pebbles pass so near Luc's head, that one might have thought him struck. He no longer turned round, but still and ever ascended the Rue de Brias at the same leisurely pace as before, like one who, after going for a stroll, is returning home. But at last a stone did hit him, tearing his right ear; and then another, striking his left hand, cut the palm of it open. At this his blood gushed out, and fell in big red drops upon the ground.

'To death with the thief and poisoner! To death with him!' some of the crowd still cried. But an eddy of panic momentarily stayed the advance. Several people ran off, seized with cowardice, now that the moment to kill the man seemed to have arrived. Some of the women, too, shrieked, and carried the children away in their arms. Only the most furious fanatics then kept up the pursuit. Luc, still continuing his painful journey, just glanced at his hand; then, after wiping his ear with his handkerchief, he wrapped the latter over his bleeding palm. But he had slackened his pace, and could hear his pursuers drawing quite near to him. When on the nape of his neck he detected the ardent panting of the throng, he turned round for the last time. Rushing on frantically, in the front rank, was the short and scraggy workman with carrotty hair and big dull eyes. He was a smith belonging to the Abyss, it was said. With a final bound he reached the man whom he had been following from the bottom of the street, and though there seemed to be no motive for his frenzied hatred, he spat with the greatest violence in his face.

'To death with the thief! To death with the poisoner! To death with him!'

Luc had at last ascended his Calvary—he was at the top of the Rue de Brias now. But he staggered beneath that final abominable outrage. His face became frightfully pale, and an involuntary impulse of his whole being prompted him to raise his uninjured hand and clench it vengefully. He looked like some superb giant beside a wretched dwarf, for with one blow he could have felled the little workman to the ground. But his consciousness of strength enabled him to restrain himself. He did not bring down his fist. From his eyes, however, flowed two big tears, tears of infinite grief

which hitherto he had been able to keep back, but which he could now no longer hide, such had become the bitterness of his feelings. He wept to think that there should be so much ignorance, so terrible a misunderstanding, that all those poor, unhappy, well-loved toilers should refuse to be saved! And they, after sneering at him, allowed him to return home, bleeding, and all alone.

In the evening Luc shut himself up in the little pavilion which he still occupied at the end of the park, alongside the road to Les Combettes. His acquittal did not leave him any illusions. The violence displayed towards him that afternoon, the savage pursuit of the crowd, told him what warfare would be waged against him now that the whole town was rising. These were the supreme convulsions of an expiring social system which was unwilling to die. It resisted and struggled furiously, with the hope of staying the march of mankind. Some, the partisans of authority, set salvation in pitiless repression; others, the sentimentalists, appealed to the past and its poetry, to all indeed that man weeps for when he is forced to quit it for ever; and others, again, seized with exasperation, joined the revolutionaries as if eager to finish matters at once. And thus Luc felt that he had virtually been pursued by all Beauclair, which was like a miniature world amidst the great one. And if he remained brave and still resolved for battle, he was none the less bitterly distressed, and anxious to hide it. During the hours, few and far between, when he felt weakness coming over him, he preferred to shut himself up and drain his cup of sorrow to the dregs in privacy, only showing himself once more when he was hale and brave again. That evening therefore he barred both the doors and windows of the pavilion, and gave orders that nobody was to be admitted to see him.

About eleven o'clock, however, he fancied that he could hear some light footsteps on the road. Then came a low call, scarce audible, which made him shiver. He went to open the window, and on looking between the laths of the shutters he perceived a slender form. Then a very gentle voice ascended, saying: 'It is I, Monsieur Luc, I must speak to you at once.'

It was the voice of Josine. Luc did not even pause to reflect, but at once went to open the little door communicating with the road. And then he led her into his closed room, where a lamp was burning peacefully. But on looking at her

he was seized with terrible anxiety, for her garments were in disorder and her face was bruised.

'Good heavens! what is the matter, Josine? What has happened?' he cried.

Tears were falling from her eyes, her hair drooped about her delicate white neck, and the collar of her gown was torn away.

'Ah, Monsieur Luc, I wanted to see you,' she began. 'It isn't because he beat me again when he came home, but on account of the threats he made. It's necessary you should know of them this very evening.'

Then she related that Ragu, on learning what had happened in the Rue de Brias, the ignominious manner in which 'the governor,' as he called Luc, had been escorted out of the town, had gone off to Caffiaux's wine-shop, leading Bourron and others astray with him. And he had but lately returned home, drunk, of course, and shouting that he had had quite enough of La Crêcherie, and would not stop a day longer in a dirty den where one was bored to death, and had not even the right to drink a drop too much if one wanted to. At last, after jeering and laughing and indulging in all sorts of foul language, he had wished to compel her, Josine, to pack up their clothes at once in order that they might go off in the morning to the Abyss, where all the hands leaving La Crêcherie were readily taken on. And as she had desired him to pause before coming to such a decision, he had ended by beating her and turning her out of the house.

'Oh! I don't count, Monsieur Luc,' she continued. 'It's you who are insulted and whom they want to injure. Ragu will certainly go off in the morning—nothing can restrain him—and he will certainly carry off Bourron as well as five or six others whom he didn't name to me. For my part, I can't help it, but I shall have to follow him, and it all grieves me so much that I felt I must tell it you at once, for fear lest I might never see you again.'

Luc was still looking at her, and a wave of bitterness submerged his heart. Was the disaster even greater than he had supposed? His workmen now were leaving him, returning to the hard toil and filthy wretchedness of former times, seized with nostalgia for the hell whence he had so laboriously striven to extricate them. In four years he had won naught of their minds or their affection. And the worst was that Josine was no happier; she now came back

to him as on the first day, insulted, beaten, cast into the street! Thus nothing was done, and everything remained to be done; for did not Josine personify the suffering people? It was only on that evening, when he had met her grief-stricken and abandoned, a victim of accursed toil, imposed on human kind like slavery, that he had yielded to his desires to act. She was the most humble, the lowest, the nearest to the gutter, and she was also the most beautiful, the gentlest, the saintliest. Ah! as long as woman should suffer, the world would not be saved.

'Oh! Josine, Josine, how grieved I am for you—how I pity you!' he murmured with infinite tenderness, whilst he also began to weep.

When she saw his tears thus falling, she suffered yet more grievously than before. What! he was weeping thus bitterly, he, her god, he whom she adored, like some superior power, in gratitude for all the help he had brought her, the joy with which he had henceforth filled her life! The thought, too, of the outrages that he had undergone, that awful ascent of the Rue de Brias, increased her adoration, drew her near to him as with a desire to dress his wounds. What could she do to comfort him, how could she efface from his face the insult spat upon him, enable him to feel himself respected, admired, and worshipped?

'Oh, Monsieur Luc,' said she, 'you do not know how grieved I am at seeing you so unhappy, and how I should like to relieve your sorrows a little.'

They were so near together that the warmth of their breath passed over their faces. And their mutual compassion filled them with increasing tenderness. How she suffered! how he suffered! And he only thought of her, even as she only thought of him, with immensity of pity and a craving for love and felicity.

'I am not to be pitied,' said Luc at last; 'there is only you, Josine, whose suffering is a crime, and whom I must save.'

'No, no, Monsieur Luc, I do not count; it is you who ought not to suffer, for you are the providence of us all.'

Then, as she let herself sink into his arms, he clasped her passionately to his breast. It was a crisis not to be resisted—the mingling of two flames in order that they might henceforth become but one sole flame of affection and strength. Thus was their destiny accomplished. All had led them to it; a sudden vision appeared to them of their love

born one stormy evening, then slowly growing in intensity, in the depths of their hearts. Nothing henceforth could part them. They were two beings meeting in a long-awaited kiss, attaining to florescence. No remorse was possible; they loved even as they existed, in order that they might be healthy and strong and fruitful. And as Luc sat in that quiet chamber with Josine he became conscious that a great help had suddenly come to him. Love alone could create harmony in the city he dreamed of. Josine was his; and his union with the disinherited was thereby sealed. Apostle that he was of a new creed, he felt that he had need of a woman to help him to redeem mankind. The poor little beaten work-girl whom he had met one evening dying of starvation had now for him become a very queen. She had known the uttermost depths, and she would help him to create a new world of splendour and joy. She was the only one whose help he needed to complete his task.

'Give me your hand, your poor injured hand, Josine,' he gently said to her.

She gave it him; it was the hand which had been caught in some boot-stitching machinery, and the forefinger of which had been cut off. 'It is very ugly,' she murmured.

'Ugly, Josine? Oh no! it is so dear to me that I kiss it with devotion.'

He pressed his lips to the scar left by the injury, he covered the poor, slender, maimed hand with caresses.

'Oh, Luc!' she cried, 'how you love me, and how I love you!'

As that cry of happiness and hope rang out they once more flung their arms around each other's necks. Outside, over the heavy sleep of Beaulair sped the thuds of hammer-strokes, the clang of steel coming from La Crêcherie and the Abyss, both working, competing one with the other through the night. And doubtless the war was not yet over, the terrible battle between Yesterday and To-morrow was destined to become fiercer still. But in the midst of all the torture there had come a halt of happiness, and whatever sufferings might lie ahead, love at least was sown for the harvest of the future.

## III

FROM that time forward, at each fresh disaster which fell upon La Crêcherie, when men refused to follow Luc or impeded him in his endeavours to establish a community of work, justice, and peace, he invariably exclaimed: 'But they don't love! If they only loved, all would prove fruitful, all would grow and triumph in the sunlight.'

His work had reached the torturing all-deciding hour of regression, that hour when, in every forward march, there comes a struggle, a forced halt. One ceases to advance, one even recedes, the ground that has been gained seems to crumble away, and it appears even as if one would never reach one's goal. And this, too, is the hour when with firmness of mind and unconquerable faith in final victory heroes make themselves manifest.

Luc strove to restrain Ragu when he found him desirous of withdrawing from the association and returning to the Abyss. But he was confronted by an evilly disposed ranter, one who felt happy in doing wrong, since defection on the part of the men might ruin the new works. Besides there was something deeper in Ragu's case, a form of nostalgia, a craving to return to slavish labour and black misery, all that horrid past which he carried with him in his blood. In the warm sunlight, amidst the gay cleanliness of his little home, girt round with verdure, he had ever regretted the narrow evil-smelling streets of Old Beauclair, the soiled hovels through which swept a pestilential atmosphere. Whenever he spent an hour in the large clear hall of the common-house, where alcohol was not allowed, he was haunted by the acrid smells of Caffiaux's tavern. Even the orderly manner in which the co-operative stores were now managed angered him, and prompted him to spend his money after his own fashion with the dealers of the Rue de Brias, whom he himself called thieves, but with whom he at least had the pleasure of quarrelling. And the more Luc insisted, pointing out how senseless was his departure, the more stubborn did Ragu become, full of the idea that if such efforts were made to retain him, it must be because his departure would deal the works a severe blow.

'No, no, Monsieur Luc,' said he, 'there's no arrangement

possible. Perhaps I am acting stupidly, though I don't think so. You promised us all sorts of marvels—we were all to become rich men ; but the truth is that we don't earn more than elsewhere, and that we have additional worries that are not at all to my taste.'

It was indeed a fact that the shares in the profits made at La Crêcherie had, so far, amounted to little more than the salaries earned at the Abyss. But Luc made haste to answer. 'We live, and is it not everything to live when the future is certain? If I have asked sacrifices of you, it has been in the conviction that everybody's happiness lies at the end. But patience and courage are certainly necessary, together with faith in the task and a great deal of work also.'

Such language was not of a nature to influence Ragu. One expression alone had struck him. 'Oh! everybody's happiness,' he said jeeringly, 'that's very pretty. Only I prefer to begin by my own.'

Luc then told him that he was free, that his account would be settled, and that he might leave when he pleased. After all, he had no interest in retaining a malicious man, whose evil disposition might prove fatally contagious. But the thought of Josine's departure wrung Luc's heart, and he felt slightly ashamed when he realised that he had only shown so much warmth in seeking to retain Ragu at La Crêcherie because he wished to retain her there. The thought that she would go back to live amidst the filth of Old Beauclair, with that man who, relapsing into his passion for drink, would assuredly treat her with violence, was unbearable to Luc. He pictured her once more in the Rue des Trois Lunes, in a filthy room, a prey to sordid, deadly misery ; and he would no longer be near to watch over her. Yet she was his now, and he would have liked to have had her always with him in order to render her life a happy one. On the following night she came back to see him, and there was then a heart-rending scene between them : tears, vows, wild suggestions and plans. But reason prevailed ; it was needful that they should accept facts as they were, if they did not wish to compromise the success of the work which was now common to both of them. Josine would follow Ragu, since she could not refuse to do so without raising a dangerous scandal ; whilst Luc at La Crêcherie would continue battling for everybody's happiness in the conviction that victory would

some day unite them. They were strong, since love, the invincible, was with them. She promised that she would come back to see him; nevertheless how painful was the rending when she bade him good-bye, and when, on the morrow, he saw her quit La Crêcherie, walking behind Ragu, who with Bourron was pushing a little hand-cart containing their few chattels!

Three days later Bourron followed Ragu, whom he had met each evening at Caffiaux's wine-shop. His mate had joked to such a degree about the 'syrups' of the common-house, that he fancied he was acting as became a free man when in his turn he again went to live in the Rue des Trois Lunes. His wife, Babette, after at first attempting to prevent such foolish conduct, ended by resigning herself to it with all her usual gaiety. *Bah!* things would go on right enough, for her husband was a good fellow at bottom, and sooner or later would see things clearly. Thereupon she laughed, and moved her goods, simply saying *au revoir* to her neighbours; for she could not believe that she would never return to those pretty gardens which she had found so pleasant. She particularly hoped to bring back her daughter, Marthe, and her son, Sébastien, who were making so much progress at the schools. And, Sœurette having spoken of keeping them there, she consented to it.

However, the situation at La Crêcherie became yet worse, for other workmen yielded to the contagion of bad example by taking themselves off in the same fashion as Bourron and Ragu had done. They lacked faith quite as much as love, and Luc found himself battling with human bad will, cowardice, defection in various forms, such as one always encounters when one works for the happiness of others. He felt that even Bonnaire, always so reasonable and loyal, was secretly shaken. His home was troubled by the daily quarrels picked by his wife, La Toupe, whose vanity remained unsatisfied, for she had not yet been able to buy either the silk gown or the watch which she had been coveting ever since her youth. Besides, she was one of those women who regret that they have not been born princesses; and thus ideas of equality and of a community of interests angered her. She kept a hurricane perpetually blowing in the house, rationed out Daddy Lunot's tobacco more gingerly than ever, and was for ever hustling her children, Lucien and Antoinette. Two more had been born to her, Zoé and Séverin, and this again



she regarded as a disaster, for ever complaining of it to her husband. Bonnaire, however, remained very calm; he was accustomed to those storms, and they simply saddened him. He did not even answer when she shouted to him that he was a poor beast, a mere dupe, who would end by leaving his bones at La Crêcherie.

All the same Luc fully perceived that Bonnaire was scarcely with him. The man never allowed himself to speak a word of censure, he remained an active, punctual, conscientious worker, setting a good example to all his mates. But, in spite of this, there was disapproval, almost lassitude and discouragement, in his demeanour. Luc suffered greatly from it; he felt something like despair on finding such a man, whose heroism he knew and for whom he had so much esteem, drifting away so soon. If he, Bonnaire, was losing faith, could it be that the work was bad?

They had an explanation on the subject one evening, whilst seated on a bench at the door of the workshops. They had met just as the sun was setting in a quiet sky, and, sitting down, they talked together.

'It is quite true, monsieur,' said Bonnaire frankly, in reply to a question from Luc, 'I have great doubts about your success. Besides, you will remember that I never quite shared your ideas, and that your attempt seemed to me regrettable on account of the concessions you made. If I joined in it, it was, so to say, by way of experiment. But the further things go the more I see that I wasn't wrong. The experiment is made now, and something else, revolutionary action, will have to be attempted.'

'What! the experiment made!' exclaimed Luc. 'Why, we are only beginning it! It will require years—several lifetimes possibly; it may be a century-long effort of will and courage. And it is you, my friend, you a man of energy and bravery, who begin to doubt at this stage?'

As he spoke Luc gazed at Bonnaire, with his giant build, and broad, peaceful face on which one read so much honest strength. But the man gently shook his head. 'No, no,' said he, 'goodwill and courage will do nothing. It's your method which is too gentle, which places too much reliance on men's wisdom. Your association of capital, talent, and work will go on always at a jog-trot, without establishing anything substantial and final. The fact is the evil has

reached such a degree of abomination that one can only heal it by applying a red-hot iron.'

'Then what ought one to do, my friend?'

'It is necessary that the people should at once seize all the implements of labour; it is necessary that it should dispossess the *bourgeoise* class and dispose of all the capital itself in order to organise compulsory universal work.'

Once more did Bonnaire explain his ideas. He had remained entirely on the side of Collectivism, and Luc, who listened sorrowfully, felt astonished that he had in no wise won over that thoughtful but rather obtuse mind. Even as he had heard him speaking in the Rue des Trois Lunes on the night when he had quitted the Abyss, so did he find him speaking now, still holding to the same revolutionary conceptions, his faith in no degree modified by the five years which he had spent at La Cr  cherie. He held evolution to be too slow, saying that progress merely by association would demand far too many years for realisation; and he was weary of such an attempt, and only believed in immediate and violent revolution.

'We shall never be given what we don't take,' said he by way of conclusion. 'To have everything we must take everything.'

Silence fell. The sun had set, and the night shifts had started work in the resounding galleries. Luc, whilst listening to those renewed efforts of labour, could feel an indescribable sadness stealing over him as he foresaw that his work would be compromised by the eager haste of even the best to bring about their social ideal. Indeed, was it not often the furious battling of ideas which hindered and retarded the realisation of facts?

'I won't argue with you again, my friend,' he at last replied. 'I don't think that any decisive revolution is possible or likely to give good results in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. And I am convinced that association and co-operation offer the preferable road, one along which progress may be slow, but which will all the same end by leading us to the promised city. We have often talked of those matters without altogether agreeing. So what use would it be to begin afresh and thereby sadden ourselves? One thing that I do hope of you is, that in the difficulties through which we are passing you will remain faithful to the enterprise we founded together.'

Bonnaire made a sudden gesture of annoyance. 'Oh, Monsieur Luc!' he exclaimed, 'have you doubted me? You know very well that I am not a traitor, and that since you one day saved me from starving, I'm ready to eat my dry bread with you as long as may be necessary. Don't be anxious; I never say to others what I've just said to you; those are matters between you and me. Naturally, I'm not going to discourage our men here by announcing that we shall soon be ruined. We are associated, and we will remain associated until the walls fall down on our heads.'

Greatly moved, Luc pressed both his hands. And during the ensuing week he witnessed a scene in the hall where the rolling-machinery was installed, which touched him even more. He had been warned that two or three wrong-headed fellows wished to follow Ragu's example and carry off with them as many of their mates as possible. Just as he was arriving to restore order, however, he saw Bonnaire intervening vehemently in the midst of the mutineers. He thereupon stopped short and listened. Bonnaire was saying precisely what it was requisite one should say in such a difficulty, recalling the benefits that had come from the works, and calming the anxiety of his mates by promises of a better future, provided that they all worked bravely. He looked so superb, so handsome, and spoke so well that the others speedily became quiet. Influenced by the fact that one of themselves had used such sensible arguments, none spoke any further of quitting the association; and thus defection was stopped. Luc could never forget that spectacle of Bonnaire pacifying his revolted comrades with the broad gestures of a good giant, the courage of a hero of work, full of respect for freely accepted toil. Since they were fighting for the happiness of all, he would indeed have thought himself a coward had he deserted his post, even though he was of opinion that they ought to have fought the battle in another manner.

When Luc, however, expressed his thanks he was again distressed by this quiet reply. 'It was simple enough,' said Bonnaire; 'I merely did what it was my duty to do. All the same, Monsieur Luc, I shall have to bring you round to my ideas, for otherwise we shall all end by dying of starvation here.'

A few days later Luc's gloom was increased by another conversation. He was coming down from the smeltery—with

Bonnaire as it happened—when the pair of them passed before the kilns of Lange the potter, who obstinately clung to the narrow strip of land which had been left him beside the rocky ridge of the Bleuse Mountains, and which he had enclosed with a little wall of stones. In vain had Luc proposed to take him on at La Crêcherie, offering him the management of a crucible-making department which he had found it necessary to establish. Lange's reply was that he wished to remain free 'without either God or master.' So he continued dwelling in his wild den and making common pottery, pans, stock-pots, and pitchers, which he afterwards carted to the markets and fairs of the neighbouring villages, he himself drawing the cart whilst Barefeet pushed it from behind. That evening, as it happened, they were returning together from one of their rounds when Luc and Bonnaire passed before their little enclosure.

'Well, Lange, is business prospering?' the young man cordially inquired.

'Oh! always well enough to give us bread, Monsieur Luc. As you're aware, that is all that I ask for,' answered Lange.

Indeed, he only carted his wares about when bread was lacking in his home. Throughout his spare time he lingered over pottery which was not intended for sale, remaining for hours in contemplation of the things he thus made, his eyes having the dreamy expression of those of some rustic poet full of a passion to impart life to things. Even the coarse goods which he fashioned, his very pans and stock-pots, displayed a *naïveté* and purity of lines, a proud and simple gracefulness which bespoke poetic fancy. A son of the people, as he was, he had instinctively lighted upon the old primitive popular beauty, that beauty of the humble domestic utensil which arises from perfection of proportions and absolute adaptability to the uses to which the utensil is intended to be put.

Luc was struck by that beauty on examining a few unsold pieces in the little hand-cart. And the sight of Barefeet, that tall, dark, comely girl, with the strong, slender limbs of a wrestler and the firm bosom of an Amazon, likewise filled him with mingled admiration and astonishment.

'It is hard to push that along all day, isn't it?' he said to her.

But she was a silent creature, and contented herself with smiling with her big, wild eyes, whilst the potter answered in her stead: 'Oh! we rest in the shade by the wayside when

we come upon a spring,' said he. ' Things are all right, aren't they, Barefeet, and we are happy.'

The young woman had turned her eyes on him, and they glowed with boundless adoration, as for some beloved, powerful, benign master, a saviour, a god. Then without a word she pushed the little hand-cart into the enclosure and set it in place under a shed.

Lange, on his side, had watched her with a glance of deep affection. At times he feigned some roughness, as if he still regarded her as a mere gipsy picked up by the wayside. But truth to tell she was now the mistress. He loved her with a passion which he did not confess, which he hid beneath the demeanour of an uncouth peasant. In point of fact that thick-set little man with square-shaped head, bushy with a tangle of hair and beard, was of a very gentle and amorous nature.

All at once, again turning towards Luc, whom he affected to treat as a 'comrade,' he said to him in his rough, frank way: ' Well, isn't everybody's happiness getting on, then? Aren't those idiots who consent to shut themselves up in your barracks willing to be happy in the fashion you want? '

Each time that he met Luc he thus jeered at the attempt at Fourierist Communism which was being made at La Cr  cherie. And as the young man contented himself with smiling, he added: ' I'm hoping that before another six months have gone by you'll be with us, the Anarchists. I tell you once again that everything is rotten, and that the only thing is to blow old society to pieces with bombs! '

At this Bonnaire, hitherto silent, abruptly intervened. ' Oh! with bombs—that's idiotic! '

He, a pure Collectivist, was not in favour of crime, so called 'propaganda by deeds,' although he believed in the necessity of a general and violent revolution.

' What, idiotic? ' cried Lange, who felt hurt. ' Do you imagine that if the *bourgeois* are not properly prepared for it your famous socialisation of the instruments of labour will ever take place? It's your disguised Capitalism which is idiotic. Just begin by destroying everything so as to have the ground clear for building up things properly.'

They went on arguing, the Anarchism of one contending with the Collectivism of the other, and Luc remained listening to them. The distance between Lange and Bonnaire, he noticed, was as great as the distance between Bonnaire and

himself. By the extreme bitterness of their dispute one might have taken them to be men of different races, hereditary enemies, ready to devour one another, and beyond all possibility of agreement. Yet they desired the very same happiness for one and all, they met at the very same point: justice, peace, and a reorganisation of work giving bread and joy to all. But what fury, what aggressive, deadly hatred became manifest on either side as soon as there was a question of agreeing on the means to be employed to attain that end! All along the rough road of progress at each halt the brothers on the march, one and all inflamed by the same desire for enfranchisement, waged bloody battles together on the simple question whether they would do best to turn to the right or to the left.

'After all each of us is his own master,' Lange ended by declaring. 'Go to sleep in your *bourgeoise* niche, if it amuses you, mate. I know what I myself have got to do. They are getting on, they are getting on, those little presents of mine, those little pots which we shall deposit some fine morning at the sub-prefect's, the mayor's, the judge's, and the parson's. Isn't that so, Barefeet? We shall have a fine round that morning! Ah! shan't we push our cart on gaily?'

The tall and beautiful girl had now returned to the threshold, and stood out sculpturally, in sovereign fashion amongst the ruddy clay of the little enclosure. Her eyes again blazed, and she smiled like one who is all submission, ready to follow her master to the point of crime.

'She belongs to it, mate,' added Lange in all simplicity. 'She helps me.'

When Luc and Bonnaire had quitted him, without any show of animosity on either side, though they agreed together so little, they walked on for a few moments in silence. Then Bonnaire felt a desire to renew his argument and demonstrate yet once again that no salvation was possible outside of the Collectivist faith. He anathematised the Anarchists, even as he anathematised the Fourierists—the latter because they did not immediately possess themselves of the capital, now in the hands of the *bourgeois*, the former because they suppressed it by violence; and it again appeared to Luc that reconciliation would only be possible when the future community should be founded, for then, in presence of the realisation of the common dream, all sects would necessarily be contented.

But what a long road yet remained to be travelled, and how grievously he feared lest his brothers should devour one another on the way!

He returned home saddened by all that constant clashing which impeded the progress of his work. No sooner, apparently, had two men resolved to act than they began to disagree. Then, on finding himself alone, the cry which ever inflated Luc's heart burst forth from him: 'But they do not love! If they loved, all would prove fruitful and grow and triumph in the sunlight!'

Morfain was also now causing the young man a deal of worry. In vain had he tried to civilise the smelter by offering him one of the gay little houses of La Crêcherie if he would only quit his cave in the rocks. The other stubbornly refused, on the pretext that up yonder he was near his work and able to watch over it unceasingly. Luc had now confided to him the whole management of the smeltery, which worked on in the ancient fashion, pending the invention of those electrical furnaces which Jordan, never wearying, was still striving to devise.

However, the real cause of Morfain's obstinacy in refusing to come down and dwell among the men peopling the new town was the disdain, the hatred almost, with which he regarded them. He who personified the Vulcan of the primitive days, a tamer of fire, later on crushed down by prolonged slavery, toiling with heroic resignation, and ending by loving the sombre grandeur of the inferno in which fate kept him, felt irritated with those new works where toilers were to become gentlemen, using their arms but sparingly, since they would be replaced by machinery, which mere children would soon know how to drive. That desire to toil as little as possible, to cease battling personally with fire and iron, seemed to Morfain abject and wretched. He could not even understand it, but simply shrugged his shoulders whenever he thought of it during his long days of silence. And, alone and proud, he remained on his mountain-ridge reigning over the smeltery and looking down upon the new works, which the dazzling flow of liquid metal crowned as with flames four times every four-and-twenty hours.

But there was yet another reason which angered Morfain with those new times which he wished to ignore; and this was a reason which must have made the heart of the taciturn smelter bleed frightfully. Ma-Bleue, his daughter, whose blue

eyes were to him like the blue of heaven, that tall and beautiful creature, who since her mother's death had worked as the well-loved housewife of the wild home, had become *enceinte*. Morfain flew into a rage when he discovered it, and then forgave her, saying to himself that she would assuredly some day have got married. But forgiveness was suddenly recalled, and became impossible when his daughter gave him her lover's name—that of Achille Gourier, the son of the mayor of Beauclair. The intrigue had been going on for years now, amidst the evening breezes, under the starry sky, along the paths of the Bleuse Mountains, and over their rocks and patches of thyme and lavender. Achille, breaking off all intercourse with his family, like a young *bourgeois* whom the *bourgeoisie* bored and disgusted, had at last begged Luc to take him on at La Crêcherie, where he had become a designer. He thus severed every tie connecting him with his former life; he lived as he listed, resolved to toil for her whom he had chosen, like a scion of the old condemned social system whom evolution led towards the new age. What angered Morfain to such a point that he drove his daughter from home was precisely the fact that she had suffered herself to be led astray by a *monsieur*, in such wise that to him there seemed naught but rebellion and devilry in her conduct. The whole antique edifice must be tumbling to pieces since so good and beautiful a girl had shaken it by listening to, and perhaps even angling for, the son of the mayor.

As Ma-Bleue, on being turned out of doors, naturally sought a refuge with Achille, Luc was compelled to intervene. The young people did not even speak of marriage. What was the use of any such ceremony since they were quite sure that they loved one another, and would never part? Besides, in order to get married Achille would have had to address 'judicial summonses' to his father; and this seemed to him useless and vexatious trouble. In vain did Sœurette insist on the matter, in the idea that morality and the good repute of La Crêcherie still required that there should be a legal marriage. Luc ended by prevailing on her to close her eyes, for he felt that with the new generations one would be gradually compelled to accept the principle of free union.

Morfain, however, did not consent to the position so readily, and Luc had to go up one evening to reason with him. Since he had driven his daughter away the master-smelter lived alone with his son, Petit-Da, and between them they cooked



their meals, and attended to the various household duties in their rocky cave. That evening, after partaking of some soup, they had remained seated on their stools at the roughly-hewn table which they had made themselves, while the little lamp which lighted them threw the shadows of their burly figures upon the smoky stone walls.

'Yet the world advances, father,' Petit-Da was saying. 'One can't remain motionless.'

Morfain banged his fist on the table and made it shake. 'I lived as my father lived,' said he, 'and your duty is to live as I do.'

As a rule the two men scarcely exchanged four words a day. But for some time past a feeling of uneasiness had been growing up between them, and although they did all they could to avert it, disputes sometimes arose. The son, who could read and write, was being more and more affected by the evolution of the times, which penetrated even to the depths of the mountain gorges. And the father, in his proud and stubborn determination to remain merely a strong toiler, able to subjugate fire and conquer iron, indulged in sorrowful outbursts, as if his race were degenerating through all the science and useless ideas of the new era.

'If your sister hadn't read books and hadn't busied herself about what went on down below, she'd still be with us,' said he. 'Ah! it was that new town, that cursed town, that took her from us!'

This time he did not strike the table, but thrust his fist through the open doorway, into the dark night, towards La Crêcherie, whose lights twinkled like stars below the rocky ridge.

Petit-Da did not answer, in part from a sense of respect, in part because he felt embarrassed, for he knew that his father had been displeased with him ever since meeting him one day with Honorine, the daughter of Caffiaux, the tavern-keeper. Honorine, short, slender, and dark, with a gay wide-awake face, had fallen passionately in love with that gentle young giant; and he for his part thought her charming. In the discussion which had broken out that evening between the father and the son, the question at bottom was really one of Honorine. And thus the direct attack which Petit-Da had all along anticipated ended by coming.

'And you,' suddenly said his father, 'when are you going to leave me?'

This idea of a separation seemed to upset Petit-Da. 'Why, do you want me to leave you, father?' he asked.

'Oh, when a girl's in question there can only be quarrels and ruin. And besides, what girl have you chosen? Will her people even let you have her? Is there any sense in such marriages, which mix one class with another, and turn the world topsy-turvy? It's the end of everything. I've lived too long.'

Gently and tenderly his son strove to pacify him. The young man did not deny his love for Honorine. Only he spoke like a sensible lad, who was resolved to remain patient as long as might be necessary. They would see about the matter later on. Nevertheless, when he and the girl chanced to meet what harm could there be in wishing one another a friendly good day? Although folks might not be of the same position, that did not always prevent them from caring for one another. And even if different classes were to mingle a little, would that not have its good side, since they would thus learn to know each other and esteem each other more?

Morfain, however, full of wrath and bitterness, did not listen to those arguments. He suddenly rose up, and with a great tragic wave of his arm under the rocky ceiling which his head almost touched, he replied: 'Be off! be off as soon as you like! Do as your sister has done! Spit on everything that's respectable, leap into shamelessness and madness. You are no longer my children, I no longer recognise you; somebody has changed you! So leave me here alone in this wild den, where I hope the rocks will soon fall down on me and crush me to death!'

Luc, at that moment just arriving, paused on the threshold and heard those last words. He was greatly affected by them, for he held Morfain in much esteem. For a long time he reasoned with him. But the smelter, on the arrival of the young man whom he regarded as a master, had forced back his grief to become once more a mere workman, a submissive subordinate with no thoughts beyond his duties. He did not even allow himself to judge Luc, although the latter was the primary cause of the abominations which were upsetting the region and causing him so much pain. The masters after all had a right to act as they pleased, and it was for the workmen to remain honest and do their work as their elders had done it before them.

'Do not be alarmed, Monsieur Luc,' he said, 'if I happen

to have some ideas of my own, and get angry when I find them thwarted. It seldom happens, for you know that I'm no talker. And you may be quite sure that the work does not suffer from it; for I always keep one eye open, and no metal is ever run out otherwise than in my presence. After all, when one's heart is full one works all the harder. Isn't that so?'

Then, however, as Luc again strove to make peace in that unhappy family, ravaged by the evolution of which he had made himself the apostle, the master-smelter all but flew into a passion once more.

'No, no, that's enough, let me be! If you came up, Monsieur Luc, to speak to me about Ma-Bleue you did wrong, because that's the very way to make things worse. Let her stop where she is, while I stop where I am!'

Then, desirous of changing the conversation, he brusquely gave Luc some bad news, which indeed had largely brought about his fit of ill-temper.

'I should probably have gone down to you by-and-by,' he said, 'for I wanted to tell you that I went to the mine again this morning, and that we've again been disappointed in our hope of finding the rich vein. Yet I could have sworn that it would certainly be met at the end of the gallery I indicated. What would you have? An evil spell seems to have been cast over all we have undertaken for some time past. Nothing succeeds!'

Those words resounded in Luc's ears like the knell of his great hopes. He lingered for a moment talking with the father and the son, and then went down the hillside again, overcome by bitter sadness, and wondering upon what ever-increasing mass of ruins he would have to found his city.

Even at La Cr  cherie he encountered reasons for discouragement. Sc  urette still received Abb   Marle, Schoolmaster Hermeline, and Doctor Novarre, and it apparently gave her so much pleasure to have her friend Luc to lunch on those occasions that he dared not decline her invitations, in spite of the secret discomfort into which he was thrown by the everlasting disputes of the schoolmaster and the priest. Sc  urette, whose mind was at peace, did not suffer from them, and even thought that they interested Luc; whilst Jordan, wrapped in his rugs and dreaming of some experiment which he had begun, seemed to listen with a vague smile.

One Tuesday, after they had risen from table, the dispute

in the little drawing-room became exceptionally violent. Hermeline had tackled Luc with respect to the education which was being given to the children at La Crèche; he spoke of the boys and girls mingling in the five classes, of the long intervals of play that were allowed, and of the numerous hours spent in the workshops. This new school, where methods diametrically opposed to his own were pursued, had robbed him of several of his own pupils, a thing which he could not forgive. And his angular face, with its long brow and thin lips, turned pale with suppressed rage at the idea that anybody could believe otherwise than himself.

'I might consent to see those boys and girls brought up together,' said he, 'though it seems to me scarcely proper, for they already evince an abundance of evil instincts when the sexes are separated, and the extraordinary idea of uniting them can only pervert them the more. But what I hold to be inadmissible is that the master's authority is destroyed and discipline reduced to nothingness. Did you not tell me that each pupil followed his own bent, applied himself to those studies which pleased him, and was free to argue about his lessons? You call that raising energy, it seems. But what can those studies be when the pupils are always at play, when books are held in contempt, when the master's word ceases to be infallible, and when the time not spent in the garden is spent in workshops, planing wood or filing iron? A manual calling is a good thing to learn, no doubt; but there is a time for everything, and the first thing is to force as much grammar and arithmetic as possible into the brains of all those idlers!'

Luc had ceased arguing, weary as he was of coming into collision with the stubborn uncompromising views of that sectarian, who having decreed a dogma of progress according to his own lights refused to stir from it. Thus the young man quietly contented himself with replying: 'Yes, we think it necessary to render the pupils' work attractive, to change classical studies into constant lessons of things, and our object above all else is to create will, to create men!'

Hermeline thereupon exploded: 'Well, do you know what you will create?' he cried. 'You will create so many *déclassés*, so many rebels! There is only one way to give citizens to the State, and that is to make them expressly for it, such as it needs them in order to be strong and glorious. Thence comes the necessity for discipline and a system of

education preparing, according to the programmes which are recognised as the best, the workmen, the professional men, and the functionaries which the country needs. Outside the pale of authority there is no certainty. For my part I am an old republican, a free-thinker, an atheist. Nobody, I hope, will ever picture me as a man with a retrograde mind; and yet your system of education sets me beside myself, because in half a century, with such a system of work, there would be no more citizens, no more soldiers, no more patriots. Yes, indeed, I defy you to make soldiers of your so-called free men; and in that case how could the country defend itself in the event of war?

'No doubt, in the event of war, it would be necessary to defend it,' answered Luc, unmoved. 'But of what use will soldiers be some day, if men no longer fight? You talk like Captain Jollivet writes in the "*Journal de Beauclair*," when he accuses us of being traitors—men without a country.'

This touch of sarcasm, although slight, brought Hermeline's anger to a climax. 'Captain Jollivet is an idiot for whom I feel nothing but contempt,' said he. 'But it is none the less true that you are preparing a disorderly generation, in rebellion against the State, and one which would assuredly lead the Republic to the worst catastrophes.'

'All liberty, all truth, all justice are catastrophes,' said Luc, again smiling.

But Hermeline went on drawing a frightful picture of to-morrow's social system, if indeed the schools should cease to turn out citizens on a given pattern for the needs of his authoritarian republic. There would be no more political discipline, no more government possible, no more sovereignty of the State, but in lieu thereof would come disorderly license, leading to the worst forms of corruption and debauchery. And all at once Abbé Marle, who had been listening and nodding his head approvingly, could not resist an impulse to exclaim, 'Ah! yes, you are quite right, and all that is put very well indeed!'

His broad, full face, with its regular features and aquiline nose, was radiant with delight at that furious attack upon the new society, in which he felt his Deity would be condemned, regarded simply as the historical idol of a dead religion. He himself, each Sunday in the pulpit, brought forward the same accusations, prophesied the same disasters as Hermeline. But he was scarcely listened to, his church became emptier

every day, and he felt deep, unacknowledged grief thereat, confining himself more and more, as his sole consolation, within his narrow doctrines. Never had he shown himself more attached to the letter of dogma, never had he inflicted severer penance on his penitents, as if indeed he were desirous that the *bourgeois* world, over whose rottenness he threw the cloak of religion, might at least show a brave demeanour when it was submerged. On the day when his church would fall, he at any rate would be at his altar, and would finish his last mass beneath the ruins.

'It is quite true,' said he to Hermeline, 'that the reign of Satan is near at hand, what with all those lads and girls brought up together, every evil passion let loose, authority destroyed, the kingdom of God set, not in Heaven, but on earth as in the time of the pagans. The picture that you have drawn of it all is so correct that I myself could add nothing stronger.'

Embarrassed at being thus praised by the priest, with whom he never agreed on anything, the schoolmaster suddenly became silent, and gazed at the lawns of the park as if he did not hear.

'But,' resumed Abbé Marle, addressing himself this time to Luc, 'apart from the demoralising education given in your schools, there is one thing that I cannot pardon, which is that you have turned the Divinity out of doors, and have voluntarily neglected to build a church in the centre of your new town, among so many handsome and useful edifices. Do you pretend then that you can live without God? No State hitherto has been able to do so. A religion has always been necessary for the government of men.'

'I pretend nothing,' Luc replied. 'Each man is free with respect to his belief, and if no church has been built it is because none of us has yet felt the need of one. But one can be built should there be faithful to attend it. It will always be allowable for a group of citizens to meet together for such satisfactions as may please them. And with regard to the necessity of a religion, that is indeed a real necessity when one desires to govern men. But we do not desire to govern them at all; on the contrary, we wish them to live free in the free city. Let me tell you, Monsieur l'Abbé, it is not we who are destroying Catholicism, it is destroying itself, it is dying slowly of old age, like all religions, after accomplishing their historical task, necessarily die at the hour indicated

by human evolution. Science destroys all dogmas one by one; the religion of humanity is born and will conquer the world. What is the use of a Catholic church at La Crêcherie, since yours at Beauclair is already too large, growing more and more deserted, and destined one of these days to topple over ?'

The priest was very pale, but he would not understand. With the stubbornness of a believer who places his strength in affirmation without reason or proof, he contented himself with repeating : ' If God is not with you, your defeat is certain. Believe me, build a church.'

Hermeline was unable to restrain himself any longer. The priest's words of praise were still suffocating him, particularly as they had been followed by that declaration of the necessity of a religion. ' Ah, no ! ah, no, Abbé ! ' he shouted, ' no church, please ! I make no concealment of the fact that matters are hardly organised in the new town in accordance with my tastes. But if there is one thing that I approve, it is certainly the relinquishment of any State religion. Govern men ? Why yes, only instead of the priests in their churches, it is we, the citizens in our municipal buildings, who will govern them. As for the churches, they will be turned into public granaries, barns for the crops ! '

Then as Abbé Marle, losing his temper, declared that he would not allow sacrilegious language to be used in his presence, the dispute became so bitter that Doctor Novarre, as usual, was forced to intervene. He had hitherto listened to the others with his shrewd air, like a gentle and somewhat sceptical man who was not put out by any words, however violent, that might be exchanged. However, he fancied he could detect that the dispute was beginning to pain Sœurette.

' Come, come ! ' said he, ' you almost agree, since both of you put the churches to use. The Abbé will always be able to say mass provided he leaves a little space in his church for the fruits of the earth, in years of great abundance.' Then the doctor went on to speak of a new rose that he had just raised, a superb flower, its outer petals very white and pure, and its heart warmed by a pronounced flush of carmine. He had brought a bunch of the flowers, which had been placed in a vase on the table, and Sœurette looking at it smiled once more at the sight of that florescence all charm and perfume, though she still felt saddened and tired by the violence which nowadays marked the quarrels attending her Tuesday lunches.

If things went on in that fashion, it would soon be impossible for them to see one another.

And it was only now that Jordan emerged from his reverie. He had not ceased to appear attentive, as if indeed he were listening to the others. But he made a remark which showed how far away his mind had been. 'Do you know,' exclaimed he, 'that a learned electrician in America has succeeded in storing enough solar heat to produce electricity?'

When the priest, the schoolmaster, and the doctor had departed and Luc found himself alone with the Jordans profound silence fell. The thought of all the poor men who tore one another and crushed one another in their blind struggle for happiness rent the young man's heart. As time went by, seeing with what difficulty one worked for the common weal, having to contend against the revolts even of those whom one worked to save, Luc was sometimes seized with discouragement which he would not as yet confess, but which left both his limbs and his mind strengthless as after some great useless exertion. For a moment his will would capsize and seem on the point of sinking. And again that day he raised his cry of distress: 'But they don't love! If they loved all would prove fruitful, all would grow and triumph in the sunlight!'

A few days later, one autumn morning, at a very early hour, Sœurette experienced a terrible heart-blow which threw her into the greatest anguish. She invariably rose betimes, and that morning she was going to give some orders at a dairy which she had established for the infants of her *crèche*, when, as she went along the terrace which ended at the pavilion occupied by Luc, it occurred to her to glance down at the road which the terrace overlooked. And precisely at that moment the door of the pavilion opening into the road was set ajar, and she saw a woman steal out, a woman of slender form, who immediately afterwards disappeared amidst the pinkish morning mist. Nevertheless Sœurette had time to recognise her: it was Josine, leaving Luc at break of day.

Since Ragu's departure from La Crêcherie Josine, indeed, had returned to see Luc every now and then. On this occasion she had come to tell him that she should not again return, for she feared lest she might be surprised when leaving her home or returning thither by some of her inquisitive neighbours. Moreover, the idea of lying and hiding herself in order to join the man whom she regarded as a god had become so painful to her that she preferred to await the day



when she might proclaim her love aloud. Luc, understanding her, had resigned himself to this separation ; but how full of passion and despair was their hour of farewell ! They lingered there, exchanging vows, and the daylight had already come when Josine was at last able to tear herself away. Only the morning mist in some degree veiled her fitting, though not sufficiently to prevent Jordan's sister from recognising her.

Sœurette, in the shock of her discovery, had stopped short, rooted to the spot, as if she saw the earth opening before her. Such was her agitation, such a buzzing filled her ears, that at first she could not reason. She forgot that she was going to the dairy to give an order, and all at once she fled, retracing her steps at a run, returning to the house and climbing wildly to her room, the door of which she locked behind her. And then she flung herself upon her bed, striving to cover both her eyes and her ears with her hands, so that she might see and hear nothing more. She did not weep, she had not recovered full consciousness as yet, but a feeling of awful desolation, blended with boundless fright, filled her being.

Why did she suffer thus, why did she feel such a rending within her ? She had hitherto thought herself to be simply Luc's affectionate friend, his disciple and helper, one who was passionately devoted to the work which he was striving to accomplish. Yet now she was all aglow, shaken by burning fever, and this because her eyes could ever picture that other woman quitting him at daybreak. Did she love Luc then ? And had she only become conscious of it on the day when it was too late for her to win his love ? That, indeed, was the disaster : to learn in such a brutal fashion that she loved, and that another already possessed the heart over which she might perchance have reigned like some all-powerful, beloved queen. All the rest vanished : she recalled neither how her love had sprung up, nor how it had grown, nor how it was that she had remained ignorant of it, artless still in her thirtieth year, happy simply in the enjoyment of affectionate intimacy, untouched till now by passion's dart. Her tears gushed forth at last, and she sobbed over her discovery, over the sudden obstacle which had risen to part her from the man to whom unknowingly she had given both heart and soul. And now naught but the knowledge of her love existed for her ; and she asked herself, What should she do—how should she succeed in making herself loved ? For it seemed impossible that she should not be loved in return, since she herself loved

and would never cease to love. Now that her love was known to her, it began to consume her heart, and she felt that she would no longer be able to live unless it were shared. At the same time all remained confusion within her, she struggled amidst vague and contradictory thoughts, obscure plans, like a woman who, despite her years, has remained childish and suddenly finds herself confronted by the torturing realities of life.

Long must she have remained striving to annihilate herself, with her face close pressed to her pillow. The sun climbed the heavens, the morning sped on; and yet in her increasing distress she could devise no practical solution for the problem that tortured her. Ever and ever did the haunting questions come back: how would she manage to say that she loved, and how would she manage to secure love in return? All at once, however, she bethought herself of her brother. It was in him that she must confide, since he alone really knew her—knew that her heart had never lied. He was a man, he would surely understand her, and he would teach her what it is meet for one to do when a craving for happiness possesses one. Accordingly, without reasoning any further, she sprang off her bed and went downstairs to the laboratory, like a child who has at last discovered a solution for its grief.

That morning Jordan himself had experienced a disastrous check. Of recent months he had believed that he had devised a safe and cheap system for the transport of electric force. He burnt coal beside the pit it came from, and he carried electricity over long distances without the slightest loss of power, in such wise as to lessen cost price considerably. He had given four years of study to that problem amidst all the recurring ailments to which his puny frame was subject. He made the best use possible of his weak health, sleeping a great deal, wrapped round with rugs, and then methodically employing the few hours which he was able to wrest from his unkind mother Nature. For fear of disturbing his studies, the crisis through which *La Crêcherie* was passing had been hidden from him. He thought that things were going on satisfactorily at the works, and, besides, it was out of the question for him to take any interest in such matters, cloistered as he was in his laboratory, absorbed in his work, apart from which nothing seemed to exist in the whole world. That very morning at an early hour he had resumed his studies, feeling

his mind to be quite clear, and wishing to profit by it, in order to make a last experiment. And that experiment had absolutely failed; he found himself confronted by an unforeseen obstacle, some error in his calculations, some detail which he had neglected, and which suddenly became important and all-destructive, indefinitely postponing the solution that he had long sought with respect to his electrical furnaces.

It was the downfall of his hopes: so much hard work had yielded nothing, so much more of it would be necessary! Yet he remained calm, and had just wrapped himself in his rugs again, and ensconced himself in the arm-chair in which he spent so many hours, when his sister came into the laboratory. She looked so pale, so greatly distressed, that he immediately felt anxious on her account, he who had witnessed the failure of his experiment with unruffled brow, like a man whom nothing can discourage.

'What is the matter, my dear?' he asked her; 'are you not well?'

Her confession in no wise embarrassed her. Without any hesitation, like a poor creature whose heart opens with a sob, she said: 'The matter, brother dear, is that I love Luc, and that he does not love me. Ah! I am very unhappy!'

Then, simple and artless, she told her brother the whole story—how she had seen Josine leaving the pavilion, and how she had then felt such a heart-pang that she had come in search of consolation and cure: she loved Luc, and Luc did not love her!

Jordan listened in a state of stupefaction, as if she had apprised him of some unexpected, extraordinary cataclysm.

'You love Luc! you love Luc!' he repeated. 'Love, why love?' The thought that love possessed that fondly treasured sister whom he had always seen beside him like his second self, filled him with amazement. He had never thought that she might some day love, and from that cause become unhappy. Love was a craving of which he himself knew nothing, a sphere into which he had never entered. And thus, artless and ignorant as he himself was, his embarrassment became extreme.

'Oh! tell me, brother, why does Luc love that Josine, why does he not love me?' Sœurlette repeated. She was sobbing now. She had wound her arms around her brother's neck, resting her head upon his shoulder, so weighed down by

distress that he was utterly distracted. And yet what could he say to console her ?

'I don't know, little sister ; I don't know,' he answered. 'No doubt he loves her because it is his nature to love. There can be no other reason. He would love you if he had loved you the first.'

There was truth in this. Luc loved Josine because she was an *amorosa*, a woman of charm and passion, whom he had found suffering, and who had kindled into flame all the love of his heart. And besides, beauty was hers, with the passion which peoples the world.

'But, brother,' said Scœurette, 'he knew me before he knew her, so why did he not love me first ?'

More and more embarrassed by these questions, Jordan anxiously sought for delicate and kindly words: 'Perhaps,' he answered, 'it was because he lived here like a friend, a brother. He has become a brother for you and me.'

Whilst speaking thus, Jordan looked at his sister, and this time he did not tell her all that he thought. He observed her resemblance to himself. She was so slender, so frail, so insignificant. She did not represent love ; she was too pale and puny. Charming no doubt, very gentle and very kind ; but then, ever clad in black, sombre-looking and sad, as are all the silent and devoted ones. For Luc she had never been aught but an intelligent and a benevolent creature.

'You will understand, little sister,' Jordan presently resumed, 'that if he has become as it were your brother and mine, he cannot love you in the same way as he loves Josine. Such a thing would not have entered his mind. But none the less I am sure that he loves you a great deal ; he loves you indeed all the more, as much in fact as I myself love you.'

But Scœurette would not admit it. Her whole being protested dolorously, and amidst a fresh explosion of sobs she cried her distress aloud : 'No, no ; he does not love me the more ; he does not love me at all ! To love a woman as a brother ! what is that when I suffer as I am suffering now that I see him lost to me ? If I knew naught of all those things a little while ago, at least I divine them now, and I feel as if I should die—yes, die !'

Like herself, Jordan was becoming more and more distressed, and only with difficulty was he able to restrain his tears. 'Little sister, little sister,' said he, 'you grieve me

deeply. It is scarcely reasonable of you to make yourself ill like this. I no longer recognise you. You are usually so calm and sensible, and you are well aware what firmness of spirit one ought to evince in order to resist the worries of life.'

Then he wished to reason with her. 'Come,' he said, 'you have no reproach to address to Luc?'

'Oh! none. I know that he has a great deal of affection for me. We are very good friends,' she answered plaintively.

'Then you must not complain. He loves you as he is able to love, and you do wrong in getting angry with him.'

'But I am not angry! I have no hate for anybody; I only suffer.'

Again did her sobs burst forth; again did distress master her, and wring from her lips the cry: 'Why does he not love me? Why does he not love me?'

'If he does not love you as you desire to be loved, little sister,' said Jordan, 'it is because he does not know you well enough. No, he does not know you as I do; he does not know that you are the best, the gentlest, the most devoted and affectionate of women. You would have been a fit companion and helper; the one that makes life's pathway softer and easier. But the other came with her beauty, and that assuredly was a powerful force, since he followed her without perceiving you, and this although you already loved him. Come, my dear, you must resign yourself.'

He had taken her in his arms, and he kissed her hair. But she still went on struggling.

'No! no! I cannot.'

'Yes, you will resign yourself; you are too good, too intelligent to do otherwise. Some day you will forget.'

'No! Never!'

'I did wrong to say that; I will not ask you to forget. Keep the memory of it in your heart. But I do ask you to be resigned, because I well know that you are capable of resignation, even to the point of sacrifice. Think of all the disasters which would follow if you were to rebel—to speak out! Our life would be broken up, our enterprises shattered, and you would suffer a thousand times more than you do now.'

She interrupted him, quivering: 'Well, let our life be broken up! let our enterprises be shattered! At least I shall

have satisfied myself. It is cruel of you, brother, to speak to me like that. You are an egotist !'

'An egotist !' replied Jordan. 'When I am only thinking of you, my dear little sister. At this moment grief is turning your wonted kindness to exasperation. But how bitter would be your remorse if I were to allow you to destroy everything ! You would no longer be able to live in presence of the ruins that you would have piled up. Poor, dear girl ! you will resign yourself, and find happiness in abnegation and pure affection.'

Tears were choking him, and their sobs mingled. That battle between brother and sister, both so artless and so loving, was fraught with the most exquisite fraternal affection. In a tone of intense compassion, blended with boundless kindness, Jordan repeated : 'You will resign yourself ; you will resign yourself.'

She still protested, but like one who is surrendering. Her moan now was that of a poor, stricken creature whose hurt one strives to soothe : 'Oh, no ! I cannot, I do not resign myself.'

As it happened, Luc that very day was to take *déjeuner* with the Jordans, and when at half-past eleven he joined the brother and sister in the laboratory, he found them still agitated, with red, blurred eyes. But he himself was so distressed, so downcast, that he noticed nothing. Josine's farewell, the necessity of that separation, filled him with despair. The severance of the love which he deemed essential for his mission seemed to deprive him of his last strength. If he did not save Josine he would never save the unhappy multitude to whom he had given his heart. And that day, from the moment of rising, all the obstacles which hindered his advance had risen up before him like insurmountable impediments. A black vision of La Crêcherie had appeared to him. La Crêcherie on the path to ruin, wrecked already, to such a point indeed that it was madness to hope to save it. Men devoured one another there ; it had been impossible to establish brotherly accord between them ; every human fatality weighed upon the enterprise. And thus, bowed down by the most frightful discouragement he had ever known, Luc lost his faith. The heroism within him wavered ; he was almost on the point of renouncing his task, fearing as he did that defeat was near at hand.

Sœurette noticed his perturbation directly she saw him, and, with divine solicitude, she expressed her anxiety: 'Are you not well, my friend?' she asked him.

'No, I do not feel well,' he answered. 'I spent an awful morning. I have heard of nothing but misfortunes since I rose.'

She did not insist, but gazed at him with increasing anxiety, wondering what his sufferings could be, since he loved and was loved in return. To hide in some slight degree her own intense emotion, she had seated herself at her little table, and pretended to be writing out some notes for her brother; whilst the latter, who now seemed overwhelmed, again lay back in his arm-chair.

'In that case, my good Luc,' said he, 'none of us is any better off than the others; for if I felt well enough when I got up this morning, I have since had no end of worry.'

For a moment Luc walked about the room, silent, with a frown upon his face. He came and went, pausing at times before one of the large windows to glance over La Crêcherie, the budding town, whose roofs spread out before him. At last, unable to restrain his despair any longer, he exploded: 'I must speak out, my friend. I owe you the truth. We did not wish to worry you in the midst of your researches, and we have hitherto hidden from you the fact that things are going on very badly at La Crêcherie. Our men are leaving us; disunion and revolt have sprung up among them, the fruit of egotism and hatred. All Beauclair is rising against us, the traders, and even the workmen themselves, whose long-acquired habits we interfere with; and thus our position is day by day becoming more and more disquieting. I don't know if I see things in too gloomy a light this morning, but they appear to me to be beyond cure. Everything seems to be lost, and I cannot hide from you any longer that we are going towards a catastrophe.'

Jordan listened with an expression of astonishment, though he remained very calm. He even smiled slightly: 'Are you not exaggerating things a little, my friend?' said he.

'Suppose that I am exaggerating; suppose that ruin will not actually fall on us to-morrow, none the less I should be acting wrongly if I failed to tell you that I fear ruin is approaching. When I asked you for your land and your money, to undertake that work of social salvation which I

dreamt of, did I not promise you not only the accomplishment of something great and beautiful, worthy of a man like you, but also a good investment? And now it appears that I did not speak the truth, for your money is likely to be swallowed up in the disaster. Is it not natural therefore that I should be haunted by remorse?'

Jordan tried to interrupt him by waving his hand, as if to say that the pecuniary question was of no importance. But Luc continued: 'It is not merely a question of the large sums which have already been swallowed up; more money is, each day, becoming necessary to continue the struggle. And I no longer dare to ask it of you; for if I can sacrifice myself entirely, I have no right to pull you and your sister down with me.'

He sank upon a chair like one overcome, whilst Sœurrette, still very pale, and seated at her little table, looked both at him and at her brother, awaiting developments in a state of deep emotion.

'Ah, really! so things are so very bad,' Jordan quietly resumed. 'Yet your idea was a very good one; you ended by convincing me of that. I did not hide from you that I took no personal interest in such political and social enterprises, being convinced that science is the only revolutionary, and will alone bring about the evolution of to-morrow, leading man towards truth and justice in their entirety. But your theory of solidarity was so beautiful. Sitting at this window after my day's work, I often looked at your town, and it was with interest that I saw it growing. It amused me; and I said to myself that I was working for it, since electricity would one day prove its chief helpmate. Must everything be abandoned, then?'

A cry of supreme renunciation came from Luc: 'My energy is exhausted,' he exclaimed, 'I have no courage left, all my faith has departed. It is all over, and I came to tell you that I am prepared to abandon everything rather than impose a fresh sacrifice upon you. How could you give me the money which we should need? How could I even have audacity enough to ask you for it?'

Never had man raised a more despairing cry. This was the evil hour, the black hour, well known to all heroes, all apostles, the hour when grace departs, when the mission becomes obscured, and the task appears impossible. Forsooth



a passing defeat, a momentary spell of cowardice, accompanied, however, by the most frightful suffering.

But Jordan again smiled quietly. He did not immediately answer the remark which Luc with a shudder had addressed to him respecting the large amount of money which would be needed if the work were to be carried on. In a chilly way he pulled his rugs over his spare limbs, then gently said: 'Do you know, my good friend, I'm not very well pleased either. Yes, a perfect disaster befell me this morning. You know how I thought that I had planned a perfect scheme for transmitting electric force cheaply and without any loss over long distances. Well, I was mistaken; I have discovered nothing of what I thought I had. An experiment which I made this morning by way of checking everything failed completely, and I have convinced myself that it is necessary to begin all over again. That means a fresh labour of years, and you will understand how worrying it is to encounter defeat when one imagines victory to be certain.'

Sœurrette had turned towards her brother, quite upset at hearing of that defeat of which she had hitherto been ignorant. In like manner Luc, prompted to compassion by his own despair, stretched out his hand in order to grasp his friend's with brotherly sympathy. And Jordan alone remained calm, apart from the slight feverish tremulousness which always came over him when he had exerted himself unduly.

'In that case what do you intend to do?' Luc inquired.

'What do I intend to do, my good friend? Why, I shall set to work again. I shall make a fresh start to-morrow; I shall begin my work anew from the very beginning. There is evidently nothing else to be done. It is simple enough. You hear me! One ought never to throw up a task. If it needs twenty years, thirty years, a whole lifetime, one still ought to persevere with it. If one makes a mistake, one must retrace one's steps and go over the whole ground afresh as many times as may be necessary. Obstacles and hindrances are inevitable on the road, and must be anticipated. A task, an *œuvre*, however, is like a sacred child, and it would be criminal not to persevere during the period of gestation. There is some of our blood in it, we have no right to refuse to perfect it, we owe it all our strength, soul, flesh, and mind. Even as a mother dies at times through

the dear little one whom she hopes to bring into the world, so should we be ready to die if our task exhaust us. And if it does not cost us life, we have but one thing to do when it is accomplished, and that is to begin another, never pausing, but taking up one task after another as long as we are erect, full of intelligence and virility.'

As Jordan spoke he seemed to become tall and strong—shielded against all discouragement by his belief in human effort, convinced of conquering provided that he devoted to the fight the last drop of blood in his veins. And to Luc, who was listening, it seemed as if a gust of energy came to him from that weak and puny being.

'Work! work!' continued Jordan; 'there is no other force in the world. When one has set one's faith in work one is invincible. Why should we doubt of to-morrow since it is we ourselves who create to-morrow by our work to-day? All that is now being sown by our work will prove to-morrow's harvest. Ah! holy work, creative, all-saving work, thou art my life, the one sole reason why I live!'

His eyes wandered afar as communing with himself he repeated those last words—that hymn to work which ever returned to his lips in moments of great emotion. And once again he related how work had ever consoled and sustained him. If he were still alive it was because he had taken into his life a task for which he had regulated all the functions of his being. He was convinced that he would not die so long as his work should remain unfinished. Bad as was his health, he had never entered his laboratory without feeling relief. How many times had he not sat down to his task with pain-racked limbs and tearful heart; yet on each occasion work had healed him. His uncertainties, his infrequent moments of discouragement had only come from his hours of idleness.

All at once he turned towards Luc with his kindly smile, and said by way of conclusion: 'You see, my friend, if you let *La Crêcherie* die, you yourself will die of it. That task is your very life, and you must live it to the end.'

Luc had risen, upbuoyed once more, for his friend's faith in work, his passionate love for his chosen task, filled him again with a spirit of heroism and restored both his faith and his strength. In his hours of lassitude and doubt there was nothing like the bath of energy which he found beside Jordan, that weak and sickly friend of his from whom peace and certainty seemed to radiate.

'Ah! you are right,' he cried; 'I am a coward, I feel ashamed that I despaired. Human happiness only exists in the glorification and reorganisation of all-saving work. It will found our city. But then, my friend, that money—all that money which must again be risked!'

Jordan, exhausted by his own passionate outburst, was now drawing his rugs more closely around his puny shoulders, and in a faint voice he simply said, 'I will give you the money. We will economise; we shall always be able to get on. Here we need very little, you know—milk, eggs, and fruit. Provided that I am still able to pay the expenses of my experiments, the rest will be all right.'

Luc had caught hold of his hands, and was pressing them with deep emotion.

'But my friend, my friend,' said he; 'there is your sister. Are we to ruin her also?'

'True,' replied Jordan, 'we have forgotten *Sœur*ette.'

They turned towards her. She was silently weeping at her little table, on which she had leant her elbows, whilst her chin rested between her hands. Big tears were streaming down her cheeks. Her poor, tortured, bleeding heart was venting all its woe. She, as well as Luc, had been stirred to the depths of her being by all that she had heard. Everything which her brother had said to his friend had resounded with equal energy within her own heart. The necessity of work, of abnegation in the presence of one's task, did that not also mean acceptance of life, whatever it might be, and resolution to live it loyally in order that all possible harmony might accrue therefrom? Like Luc, she now would have thought herself evil-minded and cowardly had she sought to hinder the great work, had she not devoted herself to it even to renunciation of all else besides. The great courage of her simple, kindly, sublime nature had returned to her once more.

She rose and pressed a long kiss upon her brother's brow; and whilst she remained beside him, with her head resting on his shoulder, she whispered to him gently, 'Thank you, brother. You have healed me; I will sacrifice myself.'

Luc, however, once again eager for action, was now bestirring himself. He had gone back towards the window, and was gazing at the glow which fell upon the roofs of La Crêcherie from the broad blue heavens. And as he came back towards the others he once more repeated his favourite cry: 'Ah! they do not love! On the day they love all will

prove fruitful ; all will spread, and grow, and triumph in the sunlight !'

Then, with a last quiver of her subjugated flesh, Scœurette, who had affectionately drawn near to him, replied : ' And one must love even without wishing to be loved in return, for it is only by loving others that the great work can ever be.'

Those words, from one who gave herself unreservedly, for the sole joy of doing so and without hope of reward, were followed by a deep, quivering silence. They no longer spoke, but all three, united by close brotherliness, gazed towards the greenery amidst which the rising city of justice and happiness would gradually but ever spread its roofs, now that so much love was sown.

#### IV

FROM that time forward Luc the builder, the founder of cities, recovered his self-possession, spoke his will and acted ; and men and stones arose at his bidding. He became very gay, and carried on the struggle of La Crêcherie against the Abyss with triumphant joyousness, little by little winning over both folk and things, thanks to the craving for love and happiness which he inspired all around him. He himself felt that the secure establishment of his city would bring him back Josine. With her all the woeful ones of the whole world would be saved. In this he set his faith, and he worked by and for love, in the conviction that he would ultimately conquer.

One bright day, when the sky was radiantly blue, he came upon a scene which again heightened his spirits and filled his heart with tenderness and hope. As he was going round the dependencies of the works, desirous of giving an eye to everything, he was surprised to hear some light, fresh voices and bursts of laughter rising from a corner of the property at the foot of the mountain ridge, a spot where a wall separated the land of La Crêcherie from that of the Abyss. Approaching prudently, for he wished to see without being seen himself, Luc perceived to his delight a party of children playing freely in the sunshine, restored to all the fraternal innocence of nature.

On Luc's side of the wall, Nanet, who daily returned to La Crêcherie in search of playmates, stood beside Lucien and Antoinette Bonnaire, whom he had doubtless persuaded to

accompany him on some terrible lizard hunt. All three of them stood there with upturned faces, laughing and calling, whilst on the other side of the wall, other children who could not be seen were laughing and calling also. It was easy to understand that Nise Delaveau had had some young friends to lunch, and that the party on being dismissed to the garden had heard the calls of those outside it, one and all becoming eager to see each other, join hands, and amuse themselves together. Unfortunately, the former doorway had been walled up, for their elders had grown tired of scolding them. At Delaveau's the children were even forbidden to go to the bottom of the garden, and were punished if they were found doing so; whilst at La Crêcherie there were many efforts to make them understand that their disobedience might bring about some unpleasant affair, complaints, and even a lawsuit. But, like artless young creatures yielding to the unknown forces of the future, they continued meeting and mingling, fraternising together in total forgetfulness of all class rancour and hostility.

Shrill, pure, and crystalline voices continued rising, almost suggesting the notes of skylarks.

'Is that you, Nise? Good day, Nise!'

'Good day, Nanet! Are you by yourself, Nanet?'

'Oh, no! I'm with Lucien and Antoinette! And you, Nise, are you alone?'

'Oh! no, no, I'm with Louise and Paul! Good day, good day, Nanet!'

'Good day, good day, Nise!'

At each 'good day,' again and again repeated, came peals of laughter, so amused did they feel at talking together without seeing one another.

'I say, Nise, are you still there?'

'Why, yes, Nanet, I'm still here.'

'Nise, Nise, listen! Are you coming?'

'Oh, Nanet, how can I, since the door's walled up?'

'Jump, jump, Nise, jump, my little Nise!'

'Nanet, my little Nanet, jump, jump!'

Then came perfect delirium, all six of them repeated 'jump, jump!' whilst dancing before the wall, as if indeed they imagined that by bounding higher and higher they would at last find themselves together. They turned and waltzed, and bowed to the pitiless wall, and with that childish

power of imagination which suppresses all obstacles played as if they could really see one another.

At last a flute-like voice again arose. 'Listen, Nise! do you know what?'

'No, Nanet, I don't know.'

'Well, I'm going to get on the wall, and I'll pull you up by the shoulders and get you over here.'

'Oh! that's it, Nanet, that's it! Climb up!'

In a trice Nanet, clinging to the stone wall with hands and feet, as agile as a cat, found himself on the top of the wall. And as he sat there, bestriding it, he looked quite comical, with his big round head, his large blue eyes, and his tumbled fair hair. He was already fourteen, but he remained little, though very strong and resolute.

'Lucien, Antoinette!' he cried, 'just you keep watch.'

Then bending over Delaveau's garden, quite proud of overlooking everything on both sides of the wall, he added: 'Come on, Nise, let me catch hold of you.'

'Oh, no! not me first, Nanet! I'll keep watch over here.'

'Then who's coming, Nise?'

'Wait a minute, Nanet, be careful. Paul's climbing up. There's a trellis. He'll try it to see if it breaks.'

Silence followed. One only heard the cracking of some old woodwork, mingled with stifled laughter. And Luc began to ask himself if he ought not to restore order by scattering both bands of urchins even as one scatters sparrows on surprising them in a barn. How many times already had not he himself scolded those children, from fear lest their playfulness should prove the cause of some annoying trouble. Yet there was something very charming about the bravery and joyousness which they displayed in seeking to join one another in spite of every prohibition and every obstacle!

At last a cry of triumph arose. Paul's head appeared just above the wall, and Nanet was seen hoisting him up, and then passing him over in order that he might fall into the arms of Lucien and Antoinette. Although Paul himself was more than fourteen, he was not a heavy weight. He had remained slim and delicate, a handsome, fair-complexioned lad, very good-natured and gentle, with quick and intelligent eyes. Directly he had fallen into Antoinette's embrace he kissed her, for he knew her well, and was fond of being near her, for she was tall and pretty, and very graceful, although but twelve years old.

'That's done, Nise!' cried Nanet. 'I've passed one over. Whose turn next?'

But Nise was heard replying in a loud anxious whisper: 'Hush, hush, Nanet! There's something moving near the fowls' run. Lie down on the wall. Quick, quick!' Then the danger being past, she added: 'Look out, Nanet! It's Louise's turn now; I'll push her up!'

This time, indeed, it was Louise's head which appeared above the wall: a comical, goatish head with black and somewhat obliquely-set eyes, a slender nose and pointed chin. With her vivacity and gaiety she was very amusing. At eleven years of age she had already become a self-willed little woman, quite upsetting her parents, the worthy Mazelles, who were stupefied to find that such a riotous, enthusiastic wilding had sprung from their placid egotism. She did not even wait for Nanet to pass her over, but jumped of her own accord into the arms of Lucien, her favourite playmate, who was the oldest of all of them. A tall, sturdy lad of fifteen, endowed with great ingenuity and inventive talent, he made her some extraordinary playthings.

But Nanet was again calling. 'That makes two, Nise,' said he. 'There's only you now. Come up, quick! There's something moving again over yonder near the well.'

A sound of cracking wood was once more heard; a large piece of the trellis-work must have fallen to the ground, for Nise burst out: 'Oh! dear me, dear me, Nanet, I can't! Louise broke it with her feet, and now it's all down.'

'Never mind—it doesn't matter! Give me your hands, Nise, and I'll pull you up.'

'No, no, I can't! I'm too little; can't you see, Nanet?'

'But I tell you I'll pull you. Stretch out your arms—there! Now I'll stoop and you must stand on tip-toes. There we are! You see very well that I can pull you up.'

Evincing great dexterity, he had raised Nise with his strong young arms and seated her on the wall in front of him. She looked even more tumbled than usual, with her fair curly pate, her pink and ever-smiling mouth, and her pretty blue eyes. She and her friend Nanet formed a pair, both of them with locks of the same soft golden hue, curling and waving hither and thither.

For a moment they remained astride the wall, face to face and delighted at finding themselves so high up.

'Ah! all the same you're strong, Nanet, to have pulled me up as you did,' said the girl.

'But then you've grown quite tall, Nise. I'm fourteen now; how old are you?'

'I'm eleven, Nanet. But, I say, isn't this like being on a horse, a very tall horse, made of stone?'

'Yes, but I say, Nise, shall I stand upright?'

'Yes, upright, Nanet! I'll do the same!'

But again a stir was heard down the garden, this time in the direction of the kitchen, and the two children, full of anxiety, caught hold of each other, and fell to the ground together, locked in a close embrace. They might have killed themselves, but they laughed gaily, unhurt and delighted with their tumble. Paul and Antoinette, Lucien and Louise on their side, were already running wildly among the bushes and fallen rocks which helped to form many a delightful nook at the feet of the Bleuse Mountains.

Thinking it too late to intervene, Luc went off very softly. As the children had not seen him, they would not know that he had closed his eyes to their escapade. After all, was it not best that they should yield to the glow of youth within them, and meet and play in spite of all the prohibitions? They were like the very floescence of life, which well knew for what future harvests it thus flowered in them. And they brought with them, perchance, the reconciliation of classes, the morrow full of justice and peace which was awaited. That which their fathers could not accomplish would be accomplished by them, and yet more completely by their children, thanks to the evolution which was ever spreading. And thus Luc, as he quietly walked away, refraining from alarming them, laughed to himself as he heard them laughing, heedless of the difficulties that they would encounter when they might wish to climb over the wall again. That glimpse of the kindly future had inspired the young man with a hope, a courage to continue fighting, and a determination to achieve victory such as he had never known before.

For long months the desperate, pitiless struggle went on between La Crêcherie and the Abyss. Luc, who had momentarily thought his enterprise in jeopardy, toppling towards ruin, exerted every effort to keep it on its legs. He did not expect to gain any more ground for a long time to come, but he wished to lose none; and it was already an achievement to remain stationary, to continue living amidst the blows



which were aimed at La Crêcherie from all sides. And how mighty was the toil, and with what joyous bravery was it accomplished! Luc was always here, there, and everywhere, encouraging the men in the workshops, promoting brotherliness between one and all at the common-house, and watching over the management of the co-operative stores. He was constantly seen too in the sunlit avenues of the little town, amidst the women and the children, with whom he liked to laugh and play, as if he were the father of the young nation now springing up around him. Thanks to his genius and creative fruitfulness, things arose and grew methodically, as if in obedience to a wave of his hand. But his greatest achievement was the conquest of his workmen, amidst whom discord and rebellion had for a moment swept. Although his views were not always shared by Bonnaire, he had won that brave and kindly man's affection in such wise as to secure in him the most faithful, the most devoted of lieutenants, one without whose help it would have been impossible to carry on the enterprise. And indeed the affection which radiated from Luc had influenced all the workers of La Crêcherie, who, finding him so loving and brotherly, intent on securing happiness for others, in the conviction that he would therein find happiness himself, had gradually grouped themselves around him. Thus the staff was becoming a large family linked more and more closely together, each ending by understanding that he worked for his own delight when he worked for that of all. Over a period of six months not a single hand quitted the works, and if those who had previously left did not as yet return, the others who remained devoted themselves entirely to the enterprise, even leaving a part of their profits untouched in order that a substantial reserve fund might be formed.

At that critical period it was assuredly the solidarity evinced by all the associated workers that saved La Crêcherie from falling beneath the blows with which egotistical and jealous hatred inspired Beaulair. The reserve fund, prudently increased and managed, proved a decisive help. It enabled the folk of La Crêcherie to face difficult moments, and to avoid borrowing at heavy interest. Thanks to this fund, moreover, they were twice able to purchase new machinery, which had been rendered requisite by changes in various processes, and which largely diminished the cost of manufacture. Then, too, there came a few strokes of luck.

About that time there were some important enterprises : the laying down of railways, the building of bridges and other things in which metal work was largely used, and thus considerable quantities of rails, girders, and structural material were required. The long peace in which Europe lived vastly developed metallurgical industry in its pacific and civilising branches. Never before had iron entered so largely into the dwellings of men. Thus the output of La Crêcherie increased, though the profits did not become very large, for Luc particularly wished to sell cheaply, in the belief that cheapness would control the future. At the same time he strengthened the works by wise management and constant economy, and by gathering together that reserve fund of ready money in order that it might be brought into use at the first sign of danger ; whilst the workers' devotion to the common cause, their abnegation in foregoing a portion of their due, did the rest, enabling one to wait for the arrival of triumph without excessive hardship.

The Abyss, meantime, apparently remained in a flourishing situation ; there had been no falling-off in its turnover, and great success seemed to attend its costly output of guns and projectiles. Still this prosperity was only on the surface, and Delaveau, though he did not confess it, experienced at times serious anxiety. He certainly had on his side the whole of Beauclair—the whole of that *bourgeoise*, capitalist society whose existence was threatened. And he remained convinced that he represented truth, authority, and power, and that ultimate victory was certain. Nevertheless, after a time secret doubts began to assail him : he was disturbed at finding so much vitality in La Crêcherie, whose prompt collapse he prophesied every three months or so. He could no longer contend against the neighbouring works with respect to commercial iron and steel—those rails, girders, and structural materials which La Crêcherie turned out so well and so cheaply. There only remained to him the manufacture of superfine steel, of carefully made articles valued at three and four francs per kilogramme, and as it happened these were also made at two very important establishments in a neighbouring department. The competition of those establishments was terrible, and Delaveau felt that of the three—the Abyss and the two others—there was one too many. The question was which two of them would devour the third. Weakened as it was by the rivalry of La Crêcherie,

would not the Abyss prove to be the establishment fated to disappear? This question preyed upon the manager, although he showed more activity than ever, and professed serene confidence in the good cause, that religion of the wage system of which he had constituted himself the defender. But another matter worried him even more than the competition of rivals and the chances of industrial warfare. This was the absence of any reserve fund, such as might enable him to face some emergency, some unforeseen catastrophe. If a crisis were to arise—some strike, or simply some falling-off in trade—the result would be disastrous, for the works would not possess the wherewithal to await a revival of business. The necessity of purchasing some new plant had already compelled him to borrow three hundred thousand francs, and the heavy interest on the loan now weighed upon his annual budget. But what if he were compelled to borrow again and again, until at last he should find himself swallowed up by an abyss of indebtedness?

About this time Delaveau tried to make Boisgelin listen to reason. When he had induced the latter to confide to him the remnants of his fortune, he had certainly promised that if the Abyss were purchased he would hand him heavy interest on his capital, and enable him to continue leading a luxurious life. Now, however, that difficulties were likely to arise, he wished Boisgelin to be reasonable enough to cut down his style of living for a time. He assured him that fortune would soon smile once more, and that he would then be able to live again on his former footing, and indeed in finer style than ever. Delaveau's desire was to induce Boisgelin to content himself for a while with one half of the profits, the other half being employed to constitute a reserve fund which would enable the Abyss to emerge victoriously from such bad times as might present themselves. But Boisgelin would not listen; he demanded every penny, refusing to forego any one of the pleasures of the costly life which he was leading. Quarrels even broke out between the two cousins. Now that it seemed as if the invested capital might no longer yield the expected interest, that the toil of more than a thousand human beings might no longer suffice to keep an idler in luxury, the capitalist accused his manager of failing to keep his promises. Delaveau, though irritated by the other's idiotic thirst for perpetual enjoyment, still entertained no suspicion that behind that coxcomb, his cousin, there stood

his own wife Fernande, the all-corrupting, devouring creature, for whom all the money was squandered in caprices and folly. Life at La Guerdache was nought but a round of festivities, amidst which Fernande enjoyed such pleasing triumphs that any pause in her delights would have seemed to her to be absolute downfall. She egged on Boisgelin, she told him that her husband's powers were declining, that he did not extract from the works nearly so large a revenue as he might have done; and, according to her, the only way to spur him on was to overwhelm him with demands for money. The demeanour preserved by Delaveau—who was one of those authoritative men who never take women into their confidence, making no exception even of his wife, although he was passionately attached to her—had ended by convincing Fernande that her view was the right one, and that if she wished to realise her dream of returning to Paris with millions of francs to squander, she must harass him without cessation.

One night, however, Delaveau forgot himself in Fernande's presence. A hunt had taken place at La Guerdache that day, and in the course of it Fernande, whose delight it was to gallop about on horseback, had for a time disappeared in the company of Boisgelin. A great dinner had followed in the evening, and it was past midnight when a carriage brought the Delaveaus back to the Abyss. The young woman, who seemed overcome with fatigue, satiated as it were with the consuming enjoyment of which her life was compounded, hastened to get to bed, whilst her husband, after taking off his coat, went hither and thither about the room, looking both angry and worried.

'I say,' he ended by inquiring, 'did not Boisgelin tell you anything when you went off with him?'

At this Fernande, who was closing her eyes, opened them again in surprise. 'No,' she answered, 'nothing interesting at all events. What would you have him tell me?'

'Oh! the fact is that we had previously had a discussion together,' Delaveau resumed. 'He asked me to let him have another ten thousand francs for the end of the month. But this time I positively refused. It's impossible, it's madness!'

Fernande raised her head, and her eyes glittered. 'Madness—how's that?' said she, 'why don't you give him those ten thousand francs?'

As it happened it was she herself who had suggested the application for this money in order that Boisgelin might

purchase an electrical motor car in which she ardently desired to travel about the country at express speed.

'Why?' cried Delaveau forgetting himself. 'Because that idiot with his extravagance will end by ruining the works. We shall have a smash up if he doesn't cut down his style of living. There can be nothing more idiotic than that life of festivity which he leads, that stupid vanity of his which prompts him to let everybody despoil him.'

Startled by these words, Fernande sat up in bed looking rather pale, whilst Delaveau, with the *naïveté* of a husband blind to his wife's misconduct, went on: 'There's only one sensible person left at La Guerdache, the only one, too, who enjoys nothing there. I mean poor Suzanne. It grieves me to see her always looking so sad. However, when I begged her to-day to intervene with her husband she answered, forcing back her tears, that she was resolved to meddle in nothing.'

The idea that her husband had appealed to her lover's wife, the poor sacrificed creature, who showed such lofty dignity in her life of renunciation, brought Fernande's exasperation to a climax. But she was still more moved by the thought that the works—the very source of her enjoyment—might be in peril.

'We shall have a smash up—why do you say that?' she asked, 'I thought that the business was going on very well?'

She put this question in so anxious a tone that Delaveau, fearing that if she knew everything she might amplify the fears which he strove to hide from himself, became distrustful, and forced back the truth which anger well nigh wrung from him.

'The business is going on all right, no doubt,' said he, 'only it would go on a great deal better if Boisgelin did not perpetually empty the safe in order to continue leading an idiotic life. The man's a fool, I tell you; he has only the poor paltry brain of a coxcomb.'

Reassured by this reply, Fernande stretched herself out in bed once more. Her husband was simply an individual with a gross mind, a miser, whose desire was to part as little as possible with the large sums which were received at the works. As for his denunciation of Boisgelin, this was an indirect attack upon herself.

'My dear,' said she by way of conclusion, 'all people are not made to brutify themselves with work from morning till

night; and those who have money do right to enjoy themselves and taste the pleasures of a higher life.'

Delaveau was about to reply violently, but by an effort he managed to calm himself. Why should he try to convert his wife to his views? He treated her as a spoilt child, and let her act as she listed, never complaining of any lapses on her part, such as he condemned when others were in question. He did not even notice the folly of her life, for she was his own folly, the prized jewel which he had longed to grasp with his big, hard-working hands. She remained through all the object of his admiration and adoration, the idol for whom one sets aside both dignity and reason, and whom it is impossible to suspect.

A little later, when Delaveau in his turn had got into bed, his anxiety with respect to the position of the works came back to him. His wife lay fast asleep beside him, but he himself was unable to close his eyes, and amidst his painful insomnia the difficulties by which he was menaced seemed to become greater. Never yet, indeed, had he surveyed the future with so much insight and seen it under darker colours. He became fully conscious that the cause of the impending ruin was that mad craving for enjoyment, that sickly impatience which Boisgelin displayed to spend his money the moment it was earned. There was an abyss somewhere into which all that money sank, some abominable sore also by which exuded all the strength and gain which work should have brought with it. Accustomed as he was to be very frank with himself, Delaveau passed his life in review, and could find nothing to reproach himself with. He rose early, and was the last to leave the workshops at night, remaining on the watch throughout the day, directing the labour of his large staff as he might have directed the movements of a regiment. He incessantly brought all his remarkable faculties into play, showing a great deal of rectitude amidst his roughness, together with rare powers of logic and method and the loyalty of a fighter who has vowed to conquer and is determined to do so or to perish. Thus he suffered frightfully at feeling that in spite of all his heroism he was gliding to disaster through the collapse of everything that he set on foot, a kind of daily destruction which came he knew not whence and which his energy was powerless to stay. What he called Boisgelin's imbecile life, that gluttonous craving for pleasure, was doubtless the evil that preyed upon the works. But who,

then, was it that made the wretched man so stupid? whence came that insanity of his, which he, Delaveau, could not understand, sensible and sober worker that he was himself, hating idleness and excessive enjoyment since he knew that they destroyed all creative health?

And still he had no suspicion that the demolisher of Boisgelin's fortune, the poisoner of his mind, was his own well-loved Fernande, she who now lay beside him, looking so charming in her slumber. Whilst he, amidst the black smoke of the Abyss and the burning glow of its furnaces, exhausted himself in efforts to wring money from the toil of pain-racked workmen, she on her side strolled in gay apparel under the shady foliage of La Guerdache, flung money to the four winds of fancy, and with her white teeth crunched the hundreds of thousands of francs which more than a thousand wage-earners coined for her amidst the resounding thuds of the great hammers. That night, too, whilst her husband, with his eyes wide open in the darkness, remained tortured by the thought of future payments, wondering by what fresh efforts he might make the works produce the amounts promised to one and another, she lying by his side slept off her intoxication of the day, so weary with enjoyment that only the faintest breath came from her gluttonous breast. At last Delaveau himself ended by falling asleep, and dreamt that some weird, perverse, diabolical powers were at work beneath the Abyss, eating away the soil in such wise that the whole establishment would suddenly be engulfed on some fulgural, tempestuous night.

During the days which followed Fernande recalled the fears which her husband had expressed to her that evening. Whilst making every allowance for what she regarded as his passion for heaping up money, and his hatred of the pleasures of luxury, she could not help shuddering at the thought of a possibility of ruin. Boisgelin ruined indeed! In such a case what would become of her? That ruin would not simply mean an end to the delightful life which she had always desired as compensation for the wretched poverty of her earlier years, but it would imply their return to Paris like vanquished beings, with a flat of a thousand francs annual rental in the depths of some suburban district, and some petty employment for Delaveau in which he would vegetate whilst she herself would relapse into all the loathsome coarseness of a home of penurious toil. No! no! she would not consent to

that; she would not allow her golden prey to escape her; every muscle of her covetous being hungered for triumph. Within her slender form, instinct with such delicate charm, such light gracefulness, there was the keen appetite of a she-wolf, the most furious predatory instincts. She was resolved that she would in no wise check that appetite, that she would take her pleasure to the very end, allowing none to rob her of it. No doubt she was full of contempt for those grimy, muddy works where day and night she heard the monstrous-looking hammers forging pleasure for her; and as for the men, those toilers who roasted amidst hellish flames in order that she might lead a life of happy idleness, she regarded them as domestic animals that gave her food and spared her all fatigue. She never risked her little feet on the uneven soil of the workshops; she never evinced the faintest interest in the human flock which passed to and fro before her door, bowed down by accursed labour. Nevertheless those works and that flock were hers, and the idea that fortune might be wrested from her by the ruin of the business roused her to revolt, prompted her to defend herself as energetically as if her life itself were threatened. Whosoever harmed the works became her personal enemy, a dangerous evil-doer, of whom she was resolved to rid herself by all imaginable means. Thus her hatred of Luc had gone on increasing ever since the Sunday when they had first met at lunch at La Guerdache, where, with a woman's keen acumen, she had guessed that he was the man who would strive to bar her path. Since that time, moreover, she had frequently come into collision with him, and now it was he who threatened to destroy the Abyss and to cast her back into all the loathsomeness of mediocrity. If she should allow him a free hand her happiness would be over; he would rob her of everything that she cared for in life. And thus, beneath her seeming graciousness, she was consumed by murderous fury. One thought alone possessed her—that of suppressing that man, and she dreamt of devising some catastrophe in which he might perish.

Eight months had now gone by since Josine had bidden farewell to Luc, and since that time she had become *enceinte*. Ragu had discovered the truth one day, when in a fit of drunkenness he had wished to beat her. He himself had reverted to his old life of debauchery, leading astray all the factory girls who were foolish enough to listen to him, and utterly neglecting his own wife. Thus his discovery both



amazed and exasperated him, and terrible scenes followed it. At first he had recourse to brutality, and it was a wonder that Josine escaped alive. Then he kept her shut up for days together, or else watched her every movement. He had long spoken of casting her into the streets, he had long neglected her for the most shameless of creatures, but at present he quivered with jealous fury whenever he saw her speaking with any man out of doors. He tried by every means he could devise to wring from her her lover's name, but this she steadfastly refused to tell him, whatever might be his threats, his violence, or his promises; for after striking her he would sometimes exclaim: 'Tell me his name, tell me his name! And I promise you that I'll leave you alone!'

No suspicion of Luc entered Ragu's mind, for nobody, apart from Sœurette, was aware of Josine's visit to the pavilion. Thus Ragu sought the culprit among his own mates; but however much he might watch, however much he might question, he learnt nothing, and the efforts he made in this respect only increased his fury.

Josine meantime hid herself as much as possible; she dreaded the result for Luc should the truth be discovered. So far as she was personally concerned, she was overjoyed by what had happened, and would have gladly hastened to her lover to tell him of it. But fears for his safety came upon her, and she thought that it was best to wait; in such wise that a chance meeting alone apprised Luc of the truth. And even then Josine was only able to acquaint him with her secret by a gesture; for others were present, and it was impossible for the lovers to exchange a word.

Filled with emotion by the tidings thus imparted to him, Luc sought for further information, and soon heard of Ragu's wrath and violence, and of the close watch which he kept upon Josine. Had he, Luc, retained any doubts on the matter, the other's ferocious jealousy and exasperation would have sufficed to destroy them. From that moment he regarded Josine as his own wife. She was his, and his alone, since she was soon to become a mother—and the father of the child, and not the other, was the real and sole husband. Ragu had vowed that he would never be burdened with children, and thus there was no bond whatever between him and Josine. There can, indeed, be but one bond between man and woman, one firm and eternal bond—the bond which comes from the birth of a child. Apart from

## WORK

that, whatever human laws may union, no real marriage. Thus longed to Luc alone, and assured to him, and the child would be the love.

All the same, Luc suffered terribly. Josine was constantly being reviled in danger of receiving some dastardly blow to the young man that he should have to leave the loved woman in the clutches of Ragu, when he longed to see her in a paradise of affection. But what could he do since she so stubbornly cloistered herself in order to spare him all embarrassment and worry? She even refused to see him, for fear of some surprise that would have revealed the secret which she so tenderly buried in the depths of her dolorous heart. Thus Luc had to watch for her, in order to be able to say a few words. At last, one very dark evening, while hiding in a dim corner of the wretched Rue des Trois-Lunes, he was able to stop her for a moment as she was passing.

'Oh, Luc! is it you? How imprudent!' she gasped. 'Kiss me and run off, I beg you.'

But he, quivering, had clasped her round the waist, and was whispering passionately, 'No, no, Josine, I want to tell you . . . You are suffering too much, and it is criminal of me to leave you, who are so dear, so precious, in such suffering . . . Listen, Josine, I have come to fetch you, and you must come with me, so that I may place you in my home, your home, like a well-loved happy woman.'

She was already yielding to his gentle and consoling embrace. But all at once she freed herself. 'Oh! what are you saying, Luc? Have you no more reason than that?' she asked. 'Follow you, good heavens! when that would be confession, and would draw the greatest dangers down upon you! It is I who would then be acting wrongly, criminally, creating embarrassment for you in the work that you are accomplishing. Be off, quick! He may try to kill me, but I will never, never give him your name.'

At this Luc tried to convince her of the uselessness of such a sacrifice to the hypocrisy of the world. 'You are my wife, since I am the father of your child,' said he, 'and me it is that you ought to follow. By-and-by, when our city of justice is built, there will be no other law save that of love, and our union will be respected by one and all. Why

## WORK

the people whom we may scandalise  
to

stubbornly bent on sacrifice, saying  
and present into account, for she wished  
r istacles, in order that he might become  
shamant, he raised a cry of grief: 'What,  
turn to me then? Will that child never be  
presence of one and all?'

again she clasped him with her delicate, endearing arms,  
and with her lips near his she softly murmured: 'I will  
come back on the day when you need me, when I shall be not  
a source of embarrassment but a help, and then I will bring  
with me that dear child whose presence will endow us both  
with increase of strength.'

Black Beauclair, the old, pestilential den of accursed toil,  
lay around them, agonising in the darkness beneath the  
crushing weight of its centuries of iniquity, whilst those  
words, instinct with hope in a future of peace and happiness,  
were spoken.

'You are my husband,' resumed Josine; 'you alone will  
have formed part of my life; and ah! if you only knew with  
what delight I refrain from speaking your name, no matter  
how much I may be threatened. I keep it secret like a hidden  
flower, like hidden armour, too. Oh! do not pity me; I am  
strong and I am very happy.'

And Luc made answer: 'You are my wife; I loved you  
on the very first evening when I met you, so wretched yet so  
divine. And if you keep my name secret so will I keep yours;  
it shall be my worship and my strength till you yourself deem  
it time to cry our love aloud.'

'Oh, Luc! how good, how reasonable you are, and how  
happy we shall be!'

'It is you, Josine, who have made me good and reason-  
able, and it is because I succoured you one evening that  
we shall be so very happy later on, amidst the happiness of  
all.'

Without again speaking they remained yet another moment  
linked in a close embrace. Then Josine freed herself and  
returned, glorious and invincible, to martyrdom, whilst Luc  
disappeared amidst the gloom, strengthened by that inter-  
view and ready to resume the battle which would lead to  
victory.

A few weeks later, however, chance placed Josine's secret

in Fernande's hands. Fernande knew Ragu, whose sudden return to the Abyss had created quite a sensation there, in such wise that Delaveau had made a pretence of esteeming him, and had even appointed him master-puddler, and favoured him in other ways, although his conduct was execrable. That Fernande should have heard of the drama which had upset Ragu's home was not surprising. He made no attempt whatever to conceal the facts, but openly denounced his wife as a shameless creature, with the result that the affair became a common subject of conversation in the workshops. It was even spoken about at the manager's house, and one day in Fernande's presence Delaveau expressed his great annoyance at it all; for Ragu, now that he was wild with jealousy, worked like a madman, at times never touching a tool for three days in succession, and at others rushing upon his task and stirring the fusing metal with all the fury of a man who is seized with a longing to strike and kill.

At last one winter morning, when Delaveau was absent in Paris, whither he had gone the previous day, Fernande questioned her maid, who had just brought her the tea and toast which composed her first breakfast. Nise was seated there drinking her own milk and casting covetous eyes at her mother's tea, for tea was a thing which she was not usually allowed to drink, though she was very fond of it.

'Is it true, Félicie,' Fernande inquired, 'that the Ragus have been quarrelling again? The laundress told me that Ragu had half killed his wife.'

'I don't know if that's so, madame,' replied the maid, 'but I think she must have exaggerated, for I saw Josine pass the house a little while ago, and she looked no worse than she usually does.'

A pause followed, and then the maid, as she went off, added, 'All the same, it's pretty certain that he will end by killing her one of these days. He tells everybody that he means to do so.'

Silence fell again, and Fernande slowly ate her toast, absorbed the while in a gloomy reverie. But all at once, amidst the heavy stillness, Nise, letting her thoughts escape her unawares, began to hum in an undertone: 'Ragu isn't Josine's real husband; her husband is Monsieur Luc, Monsieur Luc, Monsieur Luc!'

At this her mother raised her eyes in stupefaction, and

gazed at the child fixedly. 'What is that you are saying, Nise?' she exclaimed. 'Why are you saying it?'

Thunderstruck at having unwittingly hummed those words aloud, Nise lowered her face over her cup, and strove to assume an innocent air. 'Oh, for nothing! I don't know.'

'You don't know, you little falsehood-teller! You certainly did not make up those words yourself. If you repeat them somebody must have told them you.'

Nise, although she was becoming more and more disturbed, feeling that she had landed herself in a nasty scrape which might have far-reaching consequences, nevertheless held out against all evidence. 'I assure you, mamma,' said she, in the most artless manner that she could assume, 'one sings things without knowing, just as they come into one's head.'

Then Fernande, seeing her repeat her fib with all the demeanour of a genuine *gamine*, suddenly felt enlightened: 'It was Nanet who told you what you sang; it can only have been Nanet.'

Nise blinked; it was indeed Nanet who had told her. But she was afraid of being again scolded and punished, as on the day when her mother had caught her returning from La Cr  cherie with Paul Boisgeline and Louise Mazelle by climbing over the wall, so she persisted in her falsehood: 'Oh! Nanet, Nanet—but I haven't seen him at all since you forbade it.'

Feverishly desirous of ascertaining the truth, her mother suddenly assumed great gentleness of manner. Such was her emotion that she forgot all question of scolding—Nise's escapades with Nanet being of little moment compared with the important matter on which she desired full enlightenment. 'Listen, little girl,' she said, 'it is very wrong to tell falsehoods. That day when I said that you should have no dessert it was because you wanted to make me believe that you and the others had climbed over the wall simply to fetch a ball. Well, to-day, if you tell me the truth, I promise that you shall not be punished. Come, be frank—it was Nanet?'

Nise, who at bottom was a good little girl, immediately replied: 'Yes, mamma, it was Nanet.'

'And he told you that Josine's real husband was Monsieur Luc?'

'Yes, mamma.'

'And, pray, what does he know about it? Why does he say that Monsieur Luc is Josine's real husband?'

Thereupon Nise became perplexed, and innocently lowered her face over her cup again. 'Oh! he knows—he knows—well, he says he knows it.'

Greatly as Fernande desired to obtain precise information on the subject, she felt that she could not put any further questions to her child. And by way of precaution she sought to destroy the effect of the eager curiosity which she had hitherto displayed: 'Nanet knows nothing,' she said; 'he talks foolishly, and you are a little stupid to repeat what he says. Don't go singing such silly things again, or else you shall never have any dessert at all.'

Then the meal was finished in silence, the mother absorbed in what she had learnt, and the child well pleased at having escaped so lightly.

Fernande spent the day in her room, reflecting. She began by asking herself if what Nanet had said could really be the truth. But how was she to doubt it? The lad had certainly heard something—discovered something—and he was too much attached to his sister to tell any falsehood about her. Moreover, a number of little incidents which Fernande now recalled rendered the story quite probable—in fact, certain. But then how could she make use of the weapon which chance had placed in her hand? In a confused way she dreamt of steeping that weapon in poison, so as to render it deadly. Never had she hated Luc so much as she hated him now. If Delaveau was at present in Paris, it was solely for the purpose of trying to negotiate a fresh loan, for the Abyss was sinking a little more each day. How great, then, would be her victory if she could succeed in suppressing the hated master of La Crêcherie, the man who threatened her life of luxury and pleasure! The enemy killed, the competition would be killed as well. With such a man as Ragu, a drunkard, full of jealousy and wrath, a prompt finish might be expected. It would doubtless suffice to inflame him, to prompt him to draw his knife. But then, again, how was she to bring this about—how was she to act? The proper course was evidently to warn Ragu, to acquaint him with the name of the man whom he had been trying to discover for three months past. Then, however, came a difficulty: how was she to warn him, where, and by whom? At first she thought of sending him an anonymous letter, and decided that she would

cut the words she needed out of some old newspaper, paste them on a sheet of paper, and post the letter in the evening. She had, indeed, already begun to cut out such words as she desired, when it suddenly occurred to her that her plan might not prove efficacious, for Ragu might pay little heed to a letter, whereas it was necessary to exasperate him. If he were not excited, fired to the point of madness, perhaps he would never strike. The truth must be cast at him like a blow—a whip stroke in the face, and under such circumstances as might madden him. But whom could she send? Whom could she choose to poison the man's mind? When night came and she went to bed, she had grown convinced that there was nobody whom she could employ, and that she herself must speak the fatal words. Chance favoured her in this design. Her husband was absent, and, on awaking at an early hour, she was able to go down and waylay Ragu as he quitted the night shift. She had an excuse quite ready; she would tell him that she wanted a woman to do some needle-work, and had thought of employing his wife, if he were willing to let her come. That proposal would enable her to raise the subject which she had at heart. And, indeed, at the first words that Fernande addressed to him with respect to his wife, Ragu burst into invectives; and when she, in a seemingly innocent way, declared that she imagined he had become reconciled to the position, for she had heard that the child was to be provided for by its father, Monsieur Luc, the man's fury became uncontrollable. The die was cast, and it was certain that he would wreak summary vengeance, for there was murder in his glance as he wildly rushed away.

It was nearly nine o'clock, and the pale morning light of winter was rising, when Luc was stabbed by Ragu. The former was about to pay his usual morning visit to the school—his greatest daily pleasure—when Ragu, who had been watching for him, secreted the while behind a clump of spindle trees, suddenly sprang forward and thrust his knife into his back, between his shoulders. Luc, standing at that moment on the very threshold of the school, laughing with some of the little girls who had come forward to meet him, gave a loud cry and fell to the ground, whilst his assailant fled up the Bleuse Mountains, where he disappeared amidst the rocks and the bushes. As it happened Scœurette had not yet arrived; she was busy at the dairy on the other side of the park. The children present fled in their terror, calling

for help, and shrieking that Ragu had just killed Monsieur Luc. Some minutes elapsed, however, before some of the men of the works heard these calls and were able to pick up the stricken man, who had swooned away. The blood that had gushed from him already formed quite a pool, and the steps of the right wing of the common-house, which the school occupied, seemed to have been baptized with gore. For the time being nobody thought of pursuing Ragu, who must have been far away already. The attention of one and all was given to Luc, who, just as the men were about to carry him into a hall adjoining the class-rooms, emerged from his swoon and gasped in a faint, entreating voice; 'No, no! to my home, my friends.'

They had to obey him, and carry him to the pavilion on a stretcher; but it was only with difficulty that they were able to lay him on his bed, and then such was the agony he experienced that he again lost consciousness.

At that moment Sœurette arrived. One of the little girls, retaining her presence of mind, had gone to warn her at the dairy, whilst, on the other hand, one of the workmen ran down to Beauclair in order to fetch Doctor Novarre. When Sœurette entered the pavilion and saw Luc lying there, with his face quite white and his body covered with blood, she believed him to be dead. Thus she at once fell upon her knees beside the bedstead, a prey to such keen grief that the secret of her love escaped her. She took hold of one of Luc's inert hands and kissed it, and sobbed, and stammered forth all the passion against which she had battled, and which she had buried deep within her. In losing him she felt that she was losing her own heart; she would love no more, she would be unable to live another day. And amidst her despair she did not perceive that Luc, upon whom her tears were falling, had at last recovered consciousness, and was listening to her with infinite affection, infinite tenderness. At last he faintly breathed the words, 'You love me. Ah! poor, poor Sœurette!'

Full of blissful surprise at finding him yet alive, Sœurette regretted nought of her confession; rather was she delighted at no longer having to lie to him, for she felt that her love was so great and so lofty it would never bring suffering on him.

'Yes, I love you, Luc!' she gasped, 'but do I count, I? You live, and that is sufficient. I am not jealous of your



happiness. Oh, Luc, you must live! you must live! and I will be your servant.'

At that tragic moment, when death seemed so near at hand, the discovery of Sœurette's mute and absolute love, which had long surrounded and accompanied him like that of some guardian angel, filled Luc with immense but dolorous rapture.

'Poor, poor Sœurette! Oh, my divine, sad friend!' he murmured in his failing voice.

But the door opened and Doctor Novarre entered in a state of keen emotion. He immediately wished to examine the wound, with the assistance of Sœurette, with whose skill as a nurse he was well acquainted. Deep silence fell. There came a moment of inexpressible anguish; then followed unhopèd-for relief, a glow of hope. The knife had struck the shoulder-blade and had swerved, reaching no vital organ, but simply gashing the flesh. At the same time the wound was a frightful one, and it seemed as if the bone might be broken, in which event complications might arise. Even if there were no immediate danger convalescence would at all events be a long time coming. Yet how joyful was the thought that death had been averted!

Luc was holding Sœurette's hand and smiling feebly at the sight of her happiness. 'And my good Jordan, does he know of it?' he asked.

'No, he knows nothing as yet; for three days past he has shut himself up in his laboratory. But I will bring him to you. Ah! my friend, how happy the doctor's assurance makes me!'

In her rapture Sœurette still let her hand rest in Luc's, when once again the door of the room opened. And this time it was Josine who entered. At the first news of the crime she had hastened to the spot, distracted, wild with grief. That which she had feared had happened! Some scoundrel had surprised and revealed her secret, and Ragu had killed Luc, her husband, the father of her child. Her life was over, there was nothing more for her to hide, she would die there, in her real home.

Luc raised a light cry at the sight of her. And quickly dropping Sœurette's hand, he held out both his arms.

'Ah! Josine,' he gasped, 'it is you—you have come back to me!'

Then, as she, staggering forward, sank down beside him,

he understood her anguish, and sought to reassure her. 'Do not grieve,' he said, 'you have come back to me with the dear little one, and I shall live—the doctor tells me so—live for both of you.'

She listened and drew a long breath, as though recovering life. Had she then reached the realisation of her hopes, that which she had awaited from life, which seems so harsh whilst it accomplishes its needful work? He would live! And it was that abominable knife-thrust which brought them together once more—they who were already for ever linked one to the other.

'Yes, yes, I have come back to you, Luc,' she said, 'and it is all over; we shall never part again since now we have nothing more to hide. Remember that I promised to return to you whenever you might have need of me, whenever I should no longer be a source of embarrassment to you. All other ties are severed: I am your wife before one and all, and my place is here, at your bedside.'

Luc was so moved, so thrilled with rapture, that tears gathered in his eyes. 'Ah! dear, dear Josine, love and happiness have come with you.'

But all at once he remembered Sœurette, and then he raised his eyes and saw her standing erect once more, on the other side of the bed; and although she looked very pale she was smiling. With an affectionate gesture he took hold of her hand again.

'My good Sœurette,' he said, 'this was a secret which I was compelled to hide from you.'

She shivered slightly, then simply answered: 'Oh! I knew it, I had seen Josine leave the pavilion one morning.'

'What! you knew it!'

Then he divined everything, and the compassion, the admiration, the affection he felt for her became infinite. Her renunciation of hope, the love which she still retained for him, and which she manifested in boundless affection, in a gift of her whole life, touched him like an act of the loftiest heroism. Drawing quite close to him she whispered: 'Have no fear, Luc, I knew it; and I shall never be aught but the most devoted and most sisterly of friends.'

'Ah, Sœurette!' he repeated, in so faint a breath that he could scarcely be heard, 'ah! my divine, sad friend!'

Noticing his exhaustion, Doctor Novarre intervened, and forbade any further talking. The doctor smiled discreetly at

all that he had learnt at that bedside. It was very nice that the injured man should have a sister, a wife to nurse him. But it was necessary to be reasonable and to refrain from encouraging fever by excess of emotion. Luc promised, however, that he would be very good ; he spoke no more, but only turned soft glances upon Josine and Sœurette, his two good angels, who stood one on the right, the other on the left of his bed.

A long pause followed. The blood of the reformer had flowed, and this was the Calvary, the passion whence triumph would arise. As the two women moved gently around him the injured man opened his eyes to smile at them again. Then he fell asleep, murmuring : ' Love has come at last, and now we shall be the conquerors.'

## V

BEFORE long complications arose, and Luc barely escaped the clutches of death. For a couple of days it was thought that he was dying. Josine and Sœurette never quitted him, and Jordan came to seat himself beside the bed of anguish, thus forsaking his laboratory, a thing which he had not done since his mother's last illness. And how great was the despair of those loving hearts which from hour to hour expected to see their dear one drawing his last breath !

The knife-thrust which Ragu had dealt Luc had quite upset La Crêcherie. Work went on in the mourning workshops, but at every moment the men desired tidings. There was great solidarity among them, and all felt an anxious affection for the victim of that crime, which did more to tighten the bonds of fraternity between them than many years of experimental humanitarianism. Even in Beauclair sympathy became apparent ; a great many people there felt for that young, handsome, and active man, whose one crime, apart from his work of justice, consisted in having loved a very charming woman, who had been incessantly reviled and beaten by her husband. Briefly, nobody seemed to be scandalised at seeing Josine instal herself at Luc's bedside. It was indeed thought quite natural, for was he not the father of the child ? And had they not purchased at the cost of many tears the right to live together ? On the other hand, the gendarmes despatched after Ragu had found no trace of

him ; for a fortnight all the researches proved fruitless, but at last, in the depths of a ravine of the Bleuse Mountains, the remains of a man, half devoured by wolves, were discovered ; and in these remains the searchers asserted that they could recognise the body of Ragu. It was impossible to draw up a death certificate on such evidence, but a legend arose to the effect that Ragu had perished either accidentally or by suicide amidst the furious madness born of his crime. In this case, if Josine were a widow, why should she not live with Luc ? And why should not the Jordans accept the situation ? The union of the young couple seemed so natural, so firm, so indissoluble, that later on the idea that they were not legally married occurred to nobody.

At last, one bright February morning, Doctor Novarre declared that he thought he might answer for Luc ; and, indeed, a few days later the latter was quite convalescent. Then Josine, who had not spared herself throughout his illness, in her turn required to be nursed, for she gave birth to a vigorous boy, named by his parents Hilaire. During the weeks which followed, Luc often spent an hour, seated in an arm-chair, near Josine's bed. The early springtide filled the room with sunshine ; on the table there was always a fresh bunch of lovely roses which the doctor brought from his garden, like a prescription of youth, health, and beauty, as he was wont to say. Between the parents was the cradle occupied by little Hilaire, whom Josine herself nursed. Yet greater strength and hope than they had previously known now flowered from their lives in the person of that child. As Luc constantly repeated, amidst the many plans for the future in which he indulged pending the time when he might set to work once more, he was now at ease, convinced that he would found the city of justice and peace, since in Josine and Hilaire he had love—fruitful love—upon his side. Nothing is founded without a child. A child is living work, the broadening and the propagation of life, the assurance that tomorrow will duly follow to-day. The mated couple alone brings life, alone works for human happiness, and will alone save poor men from iniquity and wretchedness.

On the first day when Josine, erect once more, was able to begin her new life by the side of Luc, he caught her in his arms, exclaiming : ' Ah ! you are mine alone ! your child is mine also ! And now we are perfected, and fear nothing more from fate ! '

As soon as Luc was able to resume the management of the works, the sympathy which had gone out to him on all sides helped him to accomplish prodigies. Moreover, it was not only the baptism of blood which brought about the success of La Cr  cherie, a success which now ever increased, continuously and invincibly. There was also a lucky discovery : the mine once more became a source of great wealth, for they fell at last upon considerable lodes of excellent ore, thus proving that Morfain had been right. From that time forward iron and steel were turned out of such excellent quality, and at such a low cost, that the Abyss was even threatened in its manufacture of superfine articles. All competition became impossible. And then there was also the effect of the great democratic movement which now tended on all sides to an increase in the means of communication, to an endless extension of railway lines, and to the erection of bridges, buildings, whole cities indeed, in which iron and steel were employed to a prodigious and ever larger and larger extent. Since the days of the first Vulcans who had smelted ore in a pit for the purpose of forging weapons to defend themselves and conquer dominion over beings and things, the employment of iron had been steadily spreading, and when its conquest by science should be perfect, when it would be possible to work it for next to nothing and adapt it to all usages, iron itself would become a source of justice and peace. That, however, which more particularly brought about the prosperity and triumph of La Cr  cherie was its improved management, into which there entered increase of truth, equity, and solidarity. Its success had been certain from the day when it had been founded on the provisional system of an association between capital, labour, and intelligence ; and the difficult days through which it had passed, the obstacles of all kinds, the various crises which had been deemed deadly, were simply so many inevitable jolts upon the road during the first trying days of the advance, when it is necessary that one should brace oneself for resistance if one desires to attain one's goal. All this was now clearly manifest ; the enterprise had ever been full of life, laden with sap whence the harvests of the future would spring.

The works were now like a practical lesson, a decisive experiment which would gradually convince everybody. How was it possible to deny the strength of that association of capital, labour, and intelligence when the profits became

larger from year to year, and the workmen of La Crèche earned twice as much as those of other establishments? How could one do otherwise than admit that eight hours', six hours', three hours' work—work rendered attractive by variety, and accomplished in bright, gay workshops with the help of machinery which children might have directed—was the fundamental principle necessary for future society, when one saw the wretched wage-earners of yesterday born anew, becoming healthy, intelligent, cheerful, and gentle men again as things progressed towards complete liberty and justice? How also could one do otherwise than conclude in favour of the necessity of co-operation which would suppress all intermediary parasitic growths, mere trading in which so much wealth and strength is swallowed up, when the general stores of La Crèche worked so smoothly, ever increasing the comfort of those who yesterday had been famished, and loading them with enjoyments hitherto reserved for the rich alone? How again could one do otherwise than believe in the prodigies accomplished by solidarity, which renders life so pleasant and makes it a continual festival for one and all, when one attended the happy meetings at the common-house, destined to become the people's royal palace, with its libraries, its museums, its concert-halls, its gardens, and its many diversions? And how could one do otherwise than renew the whole system of educating and rearing children in such wise that this system should no longer be based on a theory of the innate idleness of man, but on his inextinguishable craving for knowledge? And how refuse to render study agreeable and leave each pupil in possession of his individual energy, and allow the two sexes to mingle from infancy—since they are destined to share life side by side—when one beheld the prosperity of the schools of La Crèche, whence all excessive book-learning was banished, where lessons were mingled with play and rudimentary notions of professional apprenticeship, so as to help each fresh generation to draw nearer to that ideal community towards which mankind has been marching for so many centuries?

Thus the extraordinary example which La Crèche day by day displayed in the broad sunlight became contagious. There was no longer any question of theories, but one of facts evident to the eyes of all. And naturally the association gained more and more support; crowds of fresh workmen presented themselves for admission, attracted by the larger

earnings, the increase of comfort; and new buildings arose on all sides, continually adding themselves to those which had been first erected. In three years the population was doubled, and the pace of the progress was increased till it became one of incredible rapidity. This was the dreamt-of city, the city of reorganised work, restored to its status of nobility, the city of happiness at last conquered, springing naturally from the soil around the works, which likewise grew and spread, becoming, as it were, a metropolis, a central heart, the source of life, dispensing and regulating social existence. The workshops, the great halls became larger and larger until they covered acres of ground, whilst the little bright, gay dwelling-houses, standing amidst the greenery of their gardens, multiplied incessantly even as the number of workers increased. And this overflowing wave of new buildings advanced towards the Abyss, which it threatened to destroy and submerge. At first, between the two establishments there had been a great bare space made up of all the uncultivated land which Jordan owned below the ridge of the Bleuse Mountains. Now, beyond the few houses first built near La Crêcherie, there had come others and ever others, lines of houses invading everything like a rising tide, which only some two or three hundred yards separated from the Abyss. And whenever the waves might advance against it, would it not be covered, carried away, to be replaced by a triumphant florescence of health and joy? Even Old Beauclair was threatened, for one part of the new city was marching thither, and would sweep off that black and evil-smelling den of the old-time workers, that nest of pain and pestilence, where the wage-system lay at its last gasp under the crumbling ceilings of the hovels.

One evening, when Luc stood gazing at his new city, which he could already picture covering the whole estuary of the Brias gorges, Bonnaire brought Babette, Bourron's wife, to him. Said she, with her everlasting expression of good humour, 'It's like this, Monsieur Luc. My man would very much like to come back to work at La Crêcherie. Only he wasn't bold enough to come and speak to you himself, for he remembers that he took himself off in a very wrong fashion. So I've come for him.'

Then Bonnaire added: 'One ought to forgive Bourron. That wretched Ragu led him astray. There's no malice in Bourron; he's only weak, and perhaps we can still save him.'

'Oh, let him come back!' Luc gaily exclaimed. 'I do not desire the death of a sinner—rather the reverse! How many there are who only take to bad courses because they are led to them by their mates, idlers and revellers whom they cannot resist! Bourron will be a good recruit; we'll make an example of him for the benefit of the others.'

Never had Luc felt so happy. Bourron's return seemed to him a decisive symptom, albeit the man had become a mediocre worker. But, then, as Bonnaire said, would not his redemption be a victory over the wage-system? And besides, this would mean another household in the new town, another little wave added to all the others which helped to swell the tide by which the old world would be swept away.

Some days later Bonnaire again came to ask Luc to admit one of the men of the Abyss. On this occasion, however, the recruit was such a pitiable one that the former master-puddler was not disposed to insist on the matter.

'It's that poor Fauchard,' said Bonnaire; 'he's made up his mind at last. He prowled about La Crêcherie on several occasions, as you may remember; but he could come to no resolution, he was afraid to choose, to such a degree had he been brutified, exhausted by excessive labour, ever the same. He's no longer a man, you know; he's simply an old warped bit of mechanism. I fear that we shall never get anything good out of him.'

Luc was reflecting, recalling the first days that he had spent at Beauclair. 'Ah! yes,' he said, 'I know; he has a wife called Natalie, isn't that so? A woman of complaining mind, full of care, who is always in search of credit. And he has a brother-in-law, Fortuné, who when I first met him was only sixteen years old, and looked so pale, so bewildered, so shattered already by mechanical toil! Ah! the poor creatures! Well, let all of them come; why shouldn't they? This will be another example, even if we cannot make Fauchard a free and cheerful man again.'

Then in a jocular, joyful manner he added: 'This will mean another family, another house added to the others. La Crêcherie is becoming populous, eh? Do you know, Bonnaire, we are now on the high road to that beautiful great city of which I used to speak to you at the very beginning, when you were so incredulous! Do you remember? You were anxious as to the result of the experiment; and if



you remained on my side it was chiefly out of gratitude. But are you convinced now ?

Bonnaire, who seemed somewhat embarrassed, did not immediately reply. At length, in his usual frank way, he said : ' Is one ever convinced ? It's necessary that one should be able to touch the result with one's finger. The works are prosperous, no doubt ; our association is growing, the men live in more comfort ; there is a little more justice and happiness. But you know my ideas, Monsieur Luc ; it is still the accursed wage-system, and I don't yet see any realisation of Collectivism.'

It was only as a theorist that Bonnaire now defended himself. If he did not give up his ideas, as he expressed it, he at least showed admirable activity and courage in helping on the work which was going forward. He was the hero-worker, the real leader, whose brotherly example of solidarity had decided the battle in favour of La Crêcherie. When he appeared in the workshops, looking so tall, so strong, and so good-natured, all hands were stretched towards him. And he was more won over to the cause than he was willing to admit, for it delighted him to see that his comrades suffered less, tasted all sorts of delights, and dwelt in healthy homes with flowers around them. After all it seemed as if he would not go off without seeing the fulfilment of his life dream, that dream of a world in which there would be less wretchedness and more equity.

' Yes, yes, Collectivist society,' said Luc, laughing, for he knew Bonnaire well, ' we shall bring it about, even in a better way perhaps than many of its partisans imagine ; and if we don't, our children will. Be confident, Bonnaire, and remember that the future henceforth belongs to us, since our town is growing, always growing.'

Then, with a broad gesture Luc pointed to the houses which stood among the young trees, and whose roofs of coloured faïence showed so gaily in the light of the setting sun. Ever and ever did he return to those living houses which seemed to rise from the ground at his command, and which he really pictured on the march like some pacific army which had set forth to sow the future on the ruins of Old Beauclair and the Abyss.

If, however, the industrial workers of La Crêcherie alone had triumphed, the result would simply have been a happy one, with consequences still open to discussion. But it was

rendered decisive by the fact that the peasant workers of Les Combettes triumphed on their side also in the association which had been formed between the village and the factory. Here again there was only a beginning, but how great was the promise of prodigious fortune! Since the day when, realising that agreement was necessary if they were to struggle on and live, Mayor Lenfant and his assessor Yvonnot had become reconciled, and had prevailed on all the petty land-owners of the village to combine together in order to constitute one large estate of several hundreds of acres, the land had developed extraordinary fertility. Previously it had seemed as if it were becoming bankrupt, even like the great plain of La Roumagne which had once been so fruitful, and which now presented such a sorry spectacle with its poor, stunted, meagre crops. In point of fact this was simply the effect of man's stubborn laziness and ignorance, his adherence to old-fashioned methods, and the lack of proper manure, machinery, and agreement. Thus what a lesson was given to others when the peasants of Les Combettes began to cultivate their land in common. They purchased manure cheaply and procured tools and machinery at La Crêcherie in exchange for the bread, wine, and vegetables with which they supplied it. Strength came to them now that they were no longer isolated, but had formed a solid and henceforth indestructible bond between the village and the factory. And this was the long-dreamt-of reconciliation between peasant and mechanic, which for so many years had seemed impossible: the peasant supplying the corn that nourishes, and the other supplying iron and steel in order that the land might be sown with corn. If La Crêcherie needed Les Combettes, Les Combettes on the other hand could not have thriven without La Crêcherie. At all events union was at last effected, there was a fruitful alliance whence the happy community of to-morrow would spring. And what a miraculous spectacle was presented by that plain, now reviving to life. A short time previously it had been almost abandoned, and now it overflowed with crops! Amidst the other stretches of land stricken by disunion and incompetence, Les Combettes formed as it were a little sea of rich verdure which the whole region contemplated at first with stupefaction and then with envy. Such dryness, such sterility yesterday, and so much vigour and abundance to-day! Why not follow, then, the example of the folk of Les Combettes? Neighbouring villages were already

making inquiries, and showing a desire to join the movement. It was said that the mayors of Fleuranges, Lignerolles, and Bonneheux were drawing up articles of association and collecting signatures. Thus the little green sea would soon grow, join other seas, and spread its waves of greenery afar until the whole expanse of La Roumagne would form but one sole domain, one sole pacific ocean of corn, vast enough to nourish the whole of a happy people.

For pleasure's sake, Luc often took long walks through those fertile fields, and he occasionally met Feuillat, Boisgelin's farmer, who likewise strolled about, with his hands in his pockets, whilst contemplating in his silent enigmatical way the growth of the fine crops which sprang from that well-tilled land. Luc knew what a large part Feuillat had had in prompting Lenfant and Yvonnot to take the initiative, and he was aware that the farmer still advised them nowadays. Thus the young man remained full of surprise at seeing in what a lamentable condition the other left the land which he himself farmed—the land belonging to La Guerdache, whose sorry fields looked like an uncultivated desert beside the rich domain of Les Combettes.

One morning, as Luc and Feuillat were chatting whilst they sauntered along the road which separated the two estates, the former could not help remarking: 'I say, Feuillat, don't you feel ashamed at keeping your land in such poor condition, when over the way your neighbours' land is so admirably cultivated? Surely your own interest ought to urge you to active and intelligent work, such as I know you to be quite capable of.'

At first the farmer simply smiled; then he fearlessly spoke out: 'Oh, Monsieur Luc! shame is far too fine a sentiment for such poor devils as we are. As for my interest, it is just to get a living, and no more, out of this land which does not belong to me. That's what I do; I cultivate it just sufficiently to procure bread. I should simply be a dupe if I were to work it properly, manure it and improve it; for all that would only enrich Monsieur Boisgelin, who each time my lease expires is free to turn me out of doors. No, no! To make a field a good field it ought to belong to oneself, better still to everybody.'

Then he began to jeer at the folk who shouted to the peasants: 'Love the land! Love the land!' No doubt he was willing to love it; but all the same he wished to be

loved in return, or rather he did not desire to love it for the sake of others. As he repeated, his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather had loved it in all good faith, bending beneath the rod of those who exploited them, and never drawing from it aught save wretchedness and tears. For his own part he would have none of the system by which landlords ferociously imposed upon their tenants that farming system which meant that the farmer was to love and caress and fructify the soil in order to increase the owner's wealth.

A pause followed. Then in a lower voice, with an expression of concentrated ardour, Feuillat added: 'Yes, yes, the land to everybody, so that one may love it again and cultivate it properly. For my part, I'm waiting.'

Greatly struck by these words, Luc again glanced at the farmer. Close as he might keep, he was evidently a man of keen intelligence. Behind the peasant, who simply seemed unobtrusive and somewhat shy, Luc now divined a skilful diplomatist, a keen-eyed precursor, one who gazed into the future and helped on the experiment at Les Combettes with a distant object, known to him alone, in view. Luc suspected the truth, and, wishing to make certain on the point, he said: 'So, if you leave your land in that condition, it is in part to make people compare it with the neighbouring land and understand the reasons of the difference. But is it not all a dream? Surely Les Combettes will never invade and swallow up La Guerdache.'

Again did Feuillat break into a silent laugh. Then he contented himself with saying: 'Something big would have to happen between now and then. But, after all, who knows? I'm waiting.'

They took a few steps, and then, with a sweeping gesture which embraced the whole scene, the farmer resumed: 'All the same, things are moving. Do you remember what a horrid view one had from here with all those little patches of ground which yielded such poor crops? And now just look! With everything united in one estate, and cultivation in common with the help of machinery and science, the crops overflow on all sides. Ah, it is indeed a splendid sight!'

The ardent love which he had secretly retained for the soil was manifest at that moment in the fire of his glance and the enthusiasm of his voice. And Luc himself was impressed by the great gust of fruitfulness which passed,

quivering, over that sea of corn. If he felt so strong and competent at La Crêcherie, it was because he now had his granary and was assured of bread, through having added a community of peasants to his community of industrial workers. And the delight he experienced when he saw his city marching on, its waves of houses ever advancing to the conquest of the Abyss and Old Beauclair, was no greater than that which he felt when he came to view the fertile fields of Les Combettes, which on their side were likewise marching on, stretching into the neighbouring fields, and gradually spreading out into an ocean of crops which would cover La Roumagne from one to the other end. Here as there the effort was identical; the same civilisation was coming—mankind was marching towards truth, justice, peace, and happiness.

The first effect of La Crêcherie's success was to make the petty factories of the region understand the advantage they would reap by following its example and combining with it. The Chodorge works—nail works which purchased all their raw material from their powerful neighbours—were the first to come to a decision, allowing themselves to be absorbed by La Crêcherie in the interest of both sides. Then the Hauser works, which after manufacturing sabres had made scythes and sickles their specialty, likewise joined the association, forming as it were a natural adjunct of the great forge. Some difficulties arose with another establishment, that of Mirande & Co., who built agricultural machinery, for one of the two partners was a reactionist, and fought against all novelties. But the position of the firm became so critical that, fearing a catastrophe, he withdrew from it, and the other partner hastened to save his works by merging them into those of La Crêcherie. All the establishments thus drawn into the movement of association and solidarity accepted the same statutes—a division of profits based upon an alliance between capital, work, and intelligence. They ended by constituting one sole family made up of various groups, ever ready to welcome fresh adherents, and in this wise capable of spreading indefinitely. And in this there was a re-casting of society, which reconstituted itself on the basis of a new organisation of work, tending to the freedom and happiness of mankind.

Beauclair was astonished and disconcerted, and its anxiety soon reached a climax. What! would La Crêcherie grow

without cessation, absorb every little factory it might meet, this one, that one, and then that other? And would the town itself and the immense plain beside it be swallowed up and become the dependencies, the domain, the very flesh of La Crêcherie? Men's hearts were disturbed, and their brains began to wonder in what direction might lie the true interest of one and all, and the possibility of fortune. The perplexity of the petty traders, particularly the usual household purveyors, increased and increased as day by day their takings diminished. It became a question whether they would not be soon obliged to put up their shutters. The sensation was general when people learnt that Caffiaux, the grocer and taverner, had come to an arrangement with La Crêcherie by which his establishment would be turned into a simple *dépôt*, a kind of branch of the factory's general stores. Caffiaux had long been regarded as the hireling of the Abyss, more or less a spy, one who poisoned the worker with alcohol and then sold his secrets to his masters, for taverns are the strongest pillars of the wage-system. At all events the man was a suspicious character, one who ever watched to see which side would prove victorious, and who was always prepared to commit some act of treachery, readily turning his coat with the ease of one who is by no means partial to defeat.

Thus the circumstance that he had so jauntily set himself on the side of La Crêcherie greatly increased the anxiety of his neighbours, who, for their own parts, wished to take up the most profitable position as soon as possible. A pronounced movement of adherence to the association then set in, and was destined to proceed more and more rapidly. Beautiful Madame Mitaine, the bakeress, had not waited for Caffiaux's conversion to express approval of the developments at La Crêcherie, and she was quite disposed to enter the association, though her establishment remained prosperous, thanks to the reputation for beauty and kindness which she had imparted to it. Butcher Dacheux alone persevered in obstinate resistance, full of fury at the downfall of all his cherished notions. He declared that rather than yield to the current he would prefer to die amongst his last quarters of beef on the day when he should no longer find a *bourgeois* disposed to buy them at their proper price. And it seemed indeed as if this would come to pass, for his customers were gradually deserting him, and such were his fits of wrath

that assuredly he was threatened with some sudden stroke of apoplexy.

One day Dacheux betook himself to Laboque's establishment, whither he had begged Madame Mitaine also to repair. It was a question, said he, of seeing to the moral and commercial interests of the whole district. A rumour was current that the Laboques, in order to avoid bankruptcy, were on the point of making peace with Luc and joining La Crêcherie, in such a way as to become mere depositaries of its goods. Since the works had been directly exchanging their iron and steel, their tools and machinery for the bread of Les Combettes and the other syndicated villages, the Laboques had lost their best customers, the peasants of the environs, without counting the housewives and even the *bourgeoises* of Beauclair, who effected great savings by making their purchases at the stores of La Crêcherie, which Luc by a happy inspiration had ended by throwing open to everybody. This meant the death of trade, such as it had hitherto been understood, such as it was personified by the middleman who intervened between producer and consumer, increasing the cost of life, and living like a parasite on the needs of others. And thus amidst their deserted bazaar the Laboques poured forth their lamentations.

When Dacheux arrived, the woman, dark and scraggy, sat behind her counter doing nothing, for she lacked even the courage to knit herself some stockings; whilst the man, with the eyes and the snout of a ferret, came and went like a soul in distress, before the pigeon-holes full of unsold, dust-covered goods.

'What's that I hear?' cried the butcher, flushing purple. 'You've turned traitor, Laboque, so people say, you are on the point of surrendering! To think of it! You who lost that disastrous lawsuit, you who swore that you'd kill the bandit even if it should cost you your skin! Would you now set yourself against us, then, and add to the disaster?'

But Laboque, whose hopes were all shattered, burst into a rage. 'I've quite enough worry; just leave me in peace,' he answered. 'As for that idiotic lawsuit, you all urged me to it. And now you don't spend enough money with me to enable me to make my monthly payments. So you need not come taunting me about saving my skin.' And pointing to his dusty goods he went on: 'My skin's there, and if I don't come to an arrangement the bailiffs will be here next

Wednesday. Yes, it's quite true, since you want me to say it; yes, I'm negotiating with La Crêcherie, I've come to an understanding with them, and I shall sign the papers to-night. I was still hesitating, but I'm being worried beyond endurance.'

He sank upon a chair, whilst Dacheux, quite thunder-struck, and almost choking, was only able to stammer oaths. Then in her turn Madame Laboque, huddled up behind her counter, poured forth her plaint in a low and monotonous voice: 'To have worked so hard, *mon Dieu*, to have taken so much trouble when we first started in business and went selling ironmongery from village to village! And then too, all the efforts that we had to make here in order to open this shop, and enlarge it from year to year! We were rewarded, no doubt; the business prospered, and we dreamt of buying a house right in the country and of retiring to it and living on our income. But now everything is crumbling away, Beauclair has gone mad, though I can't yet understand why, *mon Dieu*!'

'Why, why?' growled Dacheux; 'why, because the Revolution has come, and the *bourgeois* are cowards and don't even dare to defend themselves. For my part, if I'm hustled too much I'll take my knives one morning, and then you'll see something.'

Laboque shrugged his shoulders. 'A lot of use that would be!' he exclaimed. 'It's all very well when folk are with one, but when a man feels that to-morrow he will be left quite alone, the best is to go where the others are going, however much it may enrage one to do so. Caffiaux understood it well enough.'

'Ah! that filthy Caffiaux!' shouted the butcher, full of fury once more. 'There's a traitor for you—a man who sells himself! You know that Monsieur Luc, that bandit, gave him a hundred thousand francs to desert us.'

'A hundred thousand francs,' repeated the ironmonger, whose eyes glowed, although he feigned ironical scepticism. 'I only wish he'd offer them to me, I'd take them at once. But no, it's stupid to be obstinate, and the sensible course is always to side with the stronger.'

'How awful! how awful!' resumed Madame Laboque in her whining voice. 'The world is certainly being turned upside down; it is coming to an end.'

Beautiful Madame Mitaine, who was just then entering



the shop, heard those last words. 'What! the end of the world,' said she gaily, 'why there were two babies, two fine big boys, born yesterday. And your children, Auguste and Eulalie, how are they? Aren't they here?'

No, they were not there, they were never there. Auguste, now nearly two-and-twenty, had acquired a passion for mechanical arts, holding trade in horror; whilst Eulalie, who was a very sensible girl, already a little housewife at fifteen, lived for the most part with one of her uncles, a farmer of Lignerolles, near Les Combettes.

'Oh! the children,' said Madame Laboque, again in a complaining voice, 'one can't rely on the children.'

'They are all so ungrateful,' declared Dacheux, who was indignant at finding no trace of his own nature in his daughter Julienne, a plump, good-looking girl of a compassionate disposition, who, although she had passed her fourteenth birthday, still played with all the little ragamuffins that infested the Rue de Brias. 'When one relies on one's children one may be sure of dying of misery and grief.'

'Well, I certainly rely on my Évariste, I do,' resumed the baker's wife. 'He's close on twenty now, but we shan't quarrel because he has refused to learn his father's calling. These young people naturally grow up with ideas different from ours, for they are born for times when we shall no longer be here. All I ask of my Évariste is to love me well, and that he does.'

She then plainly stated her position to Dacheux. If she had come to Laboque's shop at his request it was in order that it might be fully understood between them that each tradesman of Beauclair ought to retain full freedom of action. She did not as yet belong to the association of La Crêcherie, but she relied upon joining it when she might be so pleased, that is to say, when she might feel convinced that she would be acting in the general interest as well as in her own.

'It's evident that we ought to be free,' put in Laboque by way of conclusion. 'As I can't do otherwise, I shall sign to-night.'

Then Madame Laboque's moan began once more: 'I told you so, the world is topsy-turvy, this is the end of it.'

'No, no!' the beautiful Madame Mitaine again exclaimed. 'How can the world be coming to an end when our children are just getting to an age when they may marry and have children of their own, who in their turn will marry and have

children too? The young people are pushing the others aside, the world is being renewed, that's what it is—the end of a world, if you like.'

Those last words fell from her so sharply and decisively that Dacheux, banging the door behind him, went off exasperated, with bloodshot eyes and a quiver of the apoplexy by which he was threatened. As Madame Mitaine had said, it was indeed the end of a world, the end of iniquitous and rotting trade, that trade which only creates the wealth of a few at the expense of the greater number.

But Beauclair was to be upset by another and greater blow. Hitherto the success of La Crêcherie had reacted only on establishments of a similar nature, and on the petty traders, those who lived from day to day on passing customers. Thus the emotion became great indeed when one fine morning it was learnt that Mayor Gourier himself had been won over to the new ideas. He—firmly established, needing nobody, as he declared in a spirit of vanity—did not intend to join the association of La Crêcherie. But he founded another one of a similar character, dividing his large boot-works of the Rue de Brias into shares, on the basis of a partnership between capital, work, and intelligence, amongst which the profits were to be apportioned in three parts. This was simply the establishment of a new group, what may be called the clothing group, by the side of that which dealt in iron and steel. And the resemblance between the two became the more pronounced when Gourier succeeded in syndicating all the branches of the clothing industry: the tailors, hatters, hosiers, linendrapers, and mercers. Then, too, yet another group was spoken of, one which a big building contractor proposed to establish by associating all the workers of the building trade, masons, stonecutters, carpenters, locksmiths, plumbers, tilers, and painters. And this group would assuredly absorb the architects and artists, as well as the workers of the furniture trade, the cabinetmakers, upholsterers, and bronze-workers, and in time even the clockmakers and the jewellers. All this was simply logical; the example of La Crêcherie had sown that fruitful idea of so many associations forming natural groups, which grew up by themselves, in an imitative spirit, through a craving to reach the greatest possible sum of life and happiness. The law of human creation was working, and it would certainly work with increasing energy if such were necessary for the happy existence of the species. It

already became apparent that a general bond was in process of formation above these groups, a common link which would some day join them all together in a vast system of social reorganisation, which would prove the one code of the future community.

However, the idea of escaping from La Crêcherie by imitating it seemed too good a one to have emanated from a man of Gourier's intellect. Thus the general opinion was that it must have been suggested to the mayor by Sub-Prefect Châtelard, who kept himself more and more in the background and displayed more and more quiet indifference as Beauclair gradually transformed itself. The guess was a correct one, for the matter had been settled at a little *déjeuner*, when the mayor and the sub-prefect had sat face to face with only the ever-beautiful Léonore beside them.

'My dear fellow,' had said the sub-prefect, with his amiable smile, 'I believe that we are at the end of our tether. Everything is going from worse to worse in Paris, and the Revolution is approaching to sweep away whatever remains of the old, rotting, ruinous social edifice. Here, our chief man, Boisselin, is a poor, vain creature, who will be drained of his last copper by little Madame Delaveau. Nobody excepting her husband is ignorant of what becomes of the money that he still makes at the Abyss in his heroic struggle against bankruptcy. And you'll see what a disaster there will be presently. So it would really be foolish if one did not think of oneself if one does not wish to be dragged down with the others.'

At this Léonore showed some anxiety. 'Are you, yourself, threatened, my friend?' she asked.

'I? Oh, no! Who thinks of me? No Government will trouble about my paltry self, for I am clever enough to do as little as possible in the way of administrative duties, and I am always of precisely the same opinion as my superiors, whoever they may be. I shall die here, forgotten and happy, when the last Ministry collapses. But it is of you that I am thinking, my good friends.'

Thereupon he explained his ideas and enumerated all the advantages that would accrue from anticipating the Revolution by making a second Crêcherie of the Gourier boot works. The profits would not be diminished—on the contrary. Besides, he was convinced—he was too intelligent, said he, to fail to understand the truth—the future lay in

that direction, reorganised labour would end by sweeping the old iniquitous *bourgeoise* society away. As Châtelard proceeded it became manifest that in that peaceful, sceptical functionary who deliberately preserved an attitude of absolute inactivity, there had sprung up a genuine Anarchist, though in public he carefully kept this concealed beneath a demeanour of diplomatic reserve.

'You know, my dear Gourier,' he concluded with a laugh, 'all this won't prevent me from declaring myself openly against you when you have gone over to the new community. I shall say that you are a traitor or that you have lost your reason. But I shall embrace you whenever I come here, for you will have played them all a fine trick, which will bring you in a deal of money. You'll see what faces they'll pull!'

All the same, Gourier was quite scared by the other's suggestions. He did not consent, but argued the matter at great length. The whole of his past life rose up in protest. He rebelled at the idea of becoming nothing more than the partner of hundreds of workers, of whom hitherto he had been absolute master. Beneath his heavy exterior, however, there was a very shrewd business mind; he fully understood that he would risk nothing by the change, but, on the contrary, would assure his establishment against all the dangers of the future should he adopt the advice of Châtelard. Besides, he himself had been touched by the passing gale, that exaltation, that passion for reform, whose contagious fever at times of Revolution transports the very classes which are about to be despoiled. Gourier, indeed, ended by believing that the other's idea was his own, even as Léonore, by the advice of her friend Châtelard, repeated to him every morning, and thus he at last set to work.

The whole *bourgeoisie* of Beauclair was scandalised. Deputations called upon Judge Gaume to beg him to intervene with the mayor, since the sub-prefect, anxious to avoid compromising the Government, had formally declined to meddle in this sorry affair, which he proclaimed to be scandalous. Judge Gaume now led a very retired life, seeing virtually nobody since his daughter Lucile, compromised it seemed beyond remedy by an intrigue with a notary's clerk, had been obliged to seek a refuge with him. On being approached he followed the same course as Châtelard, and showed great unwillingness to go to the mayor with representations which

the latter would doubtless take in very bad part. It was then resolved to bring pressure to bear upon the judge. Captain Jollivet, his son-in-law, after Lucile's flight from her home, had, with growing wrath, thrown himself into reactionary courses. He contributed such violent articles to the 'Journal de Beauclair' that Lebleu, the printer and proprietor, becoming anxious at the turn which things were taking, feeling that it was necessary to be on the side of the stronger, and thus pass from the Abyss to the Crêcherie party, one day closed his door to him. The captain, thus disarmed and reduced to idleness, spent his time in airing his futile rancour abroad, when the idea suddenly occurred to his fellow-townsmen that he alone might compel the judge to range himself on their side. As a matter of fact the captain had not broken off all intercourse with his father-in-law; they exchanged salutes whenever they met. Accordingly, on being entrusted with the delicate mission, Jollivet presented himself at the judge's house in the most ceremonious fashion, and two long hours elapsed before he came out of it again. It was then learnt that he had only been able to extract some evasive replies from his father-in-law, but that he had become reconciled with his wife. On the following day she returned to the conjugal roof, the captain having forgiven her on her solemn promise that she would never transgress again. All Beauclair was stupefied by this *dénouement* to a very scandalous business, and the affair ended in a great outburst of laughter.

It was the Mazelles who ultimately succeeded in drawing from Gaume an expression of his views, and this purely by chance, without having been entrusted with any mission whatever. As a rule the judge went out every morning and made his way to the Boulevard de Magnolles, a long, deserted avenue, where he walked up and down in a gloomy reverie, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind him. He stooped as if beneath some final collapse, as if weighed down by the failure of his whole life, the harm he had done, or the good which he had found he could not do. And whenever he raised his eyes for a moment and gazed far away, he seemed to be looking and waiting for something which did not come, which perchance he would never see. Now one morning, on the Boulevard de Magnolles, the Mazelles, who had risen early to go to mass, mustered sufficient courage to approach the judge in order to ask him his opinion on public affairs,

so greatly did they fear that these would lead to some disaster for themselves.

'Well, Monsieur le Président, and what do you think of all that is happening?' asked Monsieur Mazelle.

The judge raised his head, and for a moment gazed into the distance. Then, reverting to his torturing reverie, thinking aloud as though nobody were listening to him, he said: 'I say that the hurricane is a long time coming—yes, the hurricane of truth and justice which will end by sweeping this abominable world away.'

'What! what!' stammered the Mazelles, thunderstruck, and imagining that they had misunderstood him. 'You want to frighten us, eh, because you think that we are not over-brave? That's in a measure true, and people tease us about it.'

But Gaume had recovered his self-possession, and as soon as he recognised the Mazelles, who stood before him scared, with pale faces, perspiring with anxiety for their money and their idle lives, his lips became curved into an expression of disdainful irony. 'What do you fear?' he resumed; 'the world will well last another twenty years, and if you are still alive then you will console yourselves for the *ennuis* of the Revolution by witnessing some very interesting things. It is your daughter who ought to think of the future.'

At this Madame Mazelle sorrowfully exclaimed: 'Ah! that's the very thing that Louise does not think about—ah! not at all. She is scarcely thirteen as yet, and when she hears us talking of what goes on, as we naturally do from morning till evening, she finds it very funny. While we despair she simply laughs. Whenever I say to her, "You wretched girl, why, you won't have a penny," she jumps about like a goat, and answers: "Oh! I don't mind that—no, not a bit; I shall be all the merrier!" But, all the same, she's a very dear girl, although she does so little of what we desire.'

'Yes,' said Gaume; 'she dreams of mapping out her life for herself. There *are* girls like that.'

Mazelle remained perplexed, for he feared that the judge was again poking fun at him. The idea that he had made a fortune in ten years, that he had since been leading the delightful life of sloth of which he had dreamt already in his youth, and that his felicity might now come to an end, that he might, perhaps, be compelled to work again if work should

become the general rule, filled him with ceaseless, intolerable anguish, which was like a first punishment for his sins.

'But the Rentes, Monsieur le Président, what would become of them, in your opinion, if all those Anarchists should succeed in turning the world topsy-turvy? As you may remember, that Monsieur Luc, who is behaving so badly, used to make fun of us, saying that the Rentes would be suppressed. In that case they may as well cut our throats.'

'Sleep in peace, I tell you,' Gaume repeated with quiet irony, 'the new social fabric will feed you if you won't work.'

Then the Mazelles went off to church, where they now burnt tapers to the Virgin in the hope of inducing her to cure Madame Mazelle; for Doctor Novarre had one day been brute enough to tell the old lady that she was not ill at all. Not ill, indeed! when she had been nursing her illness so lovingly for so many years—that illness which was her very life—to such a point had she made it her occupation, her joy, her *raison d'être*! If the doctor forsook her it must be that he deemed her incurable; at which thought, full of terror, she had addressed herself to religion, in which she now found great relief.

There was another promenader on the Boulevard de Magnolles, that desert whose quietude was so seldom disturbed by any passer-by. This was Abbé Marle, who came thither to read his breviary. But he often let the hand which held the book fall beside him, whilst still slowly walking on, absorbed, like the judge, in a gloomy reverie. Since the last events, those incidents of the evolution which was bearing the town towards a new destiny, his church had become still emptier. By way of congregation, there only remained some very old women of the people, dull-witted, obstinate creatures, and a few *bourgeoises* who supported religion because they deemed it to be the last rampart of fine society which was now crumbling to pieces. When the last of the faithful should desert the Catholic churches, leaving them to brambles and nettles like the ruins of a dead social system, another civilisation would begin. And with this threat above his head, the presence of the few *bourgeoises* and old women of the people in no wise consoled Abbé Marle, who felt that the void around him was ever increasing. Léonore, the mayor's wife, looked very decorative, no doubt, at high mass on Sundays, and

opened her purse widely to contribute to the expenses of public worship; but he knew her indignity, her life of sin, which the whole town accepted, and over which he himself had been compelled to cast the cloak of his holy office, though he regarded that life as one leading to eternal perdition, for which he himself would be accounted responsible. And still less did the support of the Mazelles content him. They were so childish and so basely egotistical. If they came to him, it was solely in the hope of extracting some personal felicity from heaven. Even as they had invested their money, so did they invest their prayers—that is, with the object of deriving Rentes from them on high. And one and all were the same in that dying society, all lacked the true faith which in the first centuries had given Christianity its force, all lacked the spirit of renunciation and absolute obedience—a spirit which was more than ever necessary nowadays if the power of the Church was to be maintained. Thus the priest no longer hid it from himself—the days were numbered, and if God in His mercy did not soon call him hence, he would, perhaps, behold the awful catastrophe—the steeple of his church falling, bursting through the roof of the nave, and crushing the altar of the Divinity.

It was in such sombre reveries that he indulged for hours whilst he walked about the Boulevard de Magnolles. He kept them well within him, and affected to remain brave and haughty, full of disdain for passing events, under the pretext that the Church was the mistress of eternity. But whenever he met Hermeline the schoolmaster, who was in a continuous rage over the successes of La Crêcherie, and ready to go over to the reactionists in order to save the Republic, he no longer discussed things with his former bitterness, but declared that he placed his trust in the Divinity, who must certainly be allowing these Anarchist saturnalia with the object of ultimately striking down the enemies of religion, and thus making it triumphant. Doctor Novarre jestingly said that the Abbé abandoned Sodom on the eve of the rain of fire. By Sodom he meant Beauclair, that plague-spot, *bourgeois* Beauclair, devoured by egotism, the town condemned to be destroyed and of which the earth must be purified, if on its site one desired to see the city of health and delight, justice and peace arise. Every symptom pointed to the approach of the final rending: the wage-system was at its last gasp, the distracted *bourgeoisie*



was passing over to the revolutionists, the despairing desire to save something of one's interests was bringing all the living strength of the country over to the conquerors; and as for what remained, the scattered, worn-out, unusable remnants of the old system, they would be swept away by the wind. The radiant Beauclair of to-morrow was already emerging from the ruins; and when Abbé Marle, as he strolled under the trees of the Boulevard de Magnolles, let his breviary fall, and slackening his pace, half-closed his eyes, it was assuredly a vision of that coming city that arose before him and filled him with such intense bitterness.

At times, Judge Gaume and Abbé Marle met in the course of those silent solitary walks. At first they did not see one another, but walked on with lowered heads, so absorbed in the contemplation of what they pictured that nothing of their surroundings remained visible to them. Each on his own side chewed the cud of his own despair—the one his regret for the world which was disappearing, the other his appeal to the world which was now rising from the ground. Exhausted religion was unwilling to die; justice, awaiting birth, was in despair that its advent should be so long delayed. However, the two men at last raised their heads, and recognised one another. Then it became necessary for them to exchange a few words.

'This is very gloomy weather, Monsieur le Président. We shall have some rain,' the priest would say.

'I fear so, Monsieur l'Abbé,' replied the judge. 'It is quite cold for the month of June.'

'Ah! how can it be otherwise? The seasons are all out of order now. There is no equilibrium left.'

'True; yet life goes on. The good sun will perhaps set everything right again.'

Then each resumed his solitary perambulations, sank into his reflections, carrying hither and thither the eternal battle between the past and the future.

It was, however, especially at the Abyss that one felt the effects of the evolution of Beauclair which the reorganisation of labour was gradually transforming. At each fresh success achieved by La Crêcherie Delaveau had to display more activity, intelligence, and courage; and naturally everything which contributed to the prosperity of the rival works to him brought disaster. Thus the discovery of excellent lodes of ore in the once-abandoned mine dealt him a terrible blow,

since it so greatly reduced the price of raw material. He could no longer continue struggling so far as commercial iron and steel were concerned. And the manufacture of guns and projectiles likewise suffered. There had been a marked falling off in orders since the money of France had been more particularly spent on manufactures that symbolised peace and social solidarity—such as railways, bridges, structures of all kinds in which iron and steel triumphed. The worst was that the orders for ordnance, which went to only a few establishments, no longer sufficed to enable all of them to pay their way, and, if the market was to be cleared, one of them at least must be killed. The least firmly established of all being at that moment the Abyss, it was the latter which the other competing foundries savagely resolved to destroy.

The difficulties of the Abyss were becoming the greater since its workmen no longer remained faithful to it. Ragu's attempt to kill Luc had thrown the comrades that he left behind him into confusion. And when Bourron, converted, brought round to reason, had returned to La Crêcherie followed by Fauchard, a general movement set in, most of the other men asking themselves why they should not follow Bourron's example, since so many advantages awaited them yonder. The success of Luc's experiment was now evident; the men employed at La Crêcherie earned twice as much as at the Abyss, and yet they only worked eight hours. And, besides, there were other attractions—the pleasant little houses, the schools where the children learned things so well and so merrily, the common-house which was ever *en fête*, and the general stores, whose prices were fully a third lower than those of other places, the whole tending to increase of health and increase of comfort.

Nothing is of any avail against figures. The men of the Abyss, wishing to earn as much as those of La Crêcherie demanded a rise in wages. As it was impossible to grant this demand, many of them naturally went off. And, finally, Delaveau was paralysed by the lack of a reserve fund. He did not yet confess himself conquered; he would have held out for a long time, and would, in his own opinion, have ended by triumphing if he had possessed a few hundred thousand francs to help him to pass through this crisis, which he obstinately believed to be a temporary one. Only how was he to continue fighting? how was he to face pay-days

when money failed him? Moreover, the money which he had already borrowed was proving a crushing charge on the business. Yet he struggled on heroically, ever erect, devoting all his intelligence, his very life, to his work, in the hope that he might still save the crumbling past which he supported, and that he might wring from the capital entrusted to him the revenue that he had promised.

Delaveau's worst sufferings, indeed, arose from the fact that he could no longer hand Boisgelin the profits which he had covenanted to extract from the business, and his defeat became materialised in the most cruel fashion on the days when he was compelled to refuse his cousin money. Although on the last occasion when accounts had been balanced the position had proved to be disastrous, Boisgelin would in no respect curtail his expenditure at La Guerdache. In this matter he was inflamed by Fernande, who treated her husband like an ox at the plough, one that needed to be goaded till it bled in order to discharge its work properly. Never had the young woman shown herself more ardent, more insatiable than now. She was consumed by a passion for excesses. There was something wild in her glance, something that suggested a desire for the impossible. Her acquaintances felt anxious about her, and Sub-Prefect Châtelard confidentially told Mayor Gourier that the little woman would assuredly end by perpetrating some great piece of folly, from which all of them would suffer. Hitherto she had contented herself with changing her home into a hell by urging Boisgelin upon her husband, pressing him with continual demands for money, whereby Delaveau was thrown into such a state of exasperation that he even continued growling at night when resting his head on the conjugal pillow. Fernande, by her remarks, maliciously kept his wound open. Nevertheless, he still adored her, set her upon one side like an innocent, immaculate being whom it was impossible to suspect.

November came with intense early cold. The payments which fell due that month were so large that Delaveau fancied he could feel the very ground he walked upon trembling beneath him. He had not the necessary amount of money in the safe. On the evening before the day on which the payments had to be made he shut himself up in his private room to reflect and write some letters, whilst Fernande went to dine at La Guerdache, whither she had been invited.

Though she was unaware of it, he himself had gone thither in the morning, and had had a decisive conversation with Boisgelin, in which, after plainly stating the terrible position, he had at last prevailed on him to reduce his expenditure. He meant to limit him to a proper allowance for several years, and had even advised him to sell *La Guerdache*. And now, alone in his private room, Delaveau walked about slowly, every now and then mechanically stirring the large coke fire which was burning in a kind of stove before the chimney-piece. The only possible means of salvation was to secure time: he must write to the creditors, who could not possibly desire to see the works closed. However, he did not hurry about it; he would write his letters after dinner. Meantime, he continued thinking whilst going from one window to the other, ever returning to the one whence he could see the far-spreading lands of *La Crêcherie*, even to the distant park and the pavilion where Luc resided. The cold, frosty atmosphere was very clear, and the sun was setting in a sky as pure as crystal, a pale golden glow bringing the growing town into delicate relief against a purple background. Never had Delaveau seen it so plainly. It seemed to palpitate with life; he could have counted the light slender branches of the trees, and he was able to distinguish the smallest details of the houses, down to the decorations of *faïence* which rendered them so gay. There came a moment when, under the oblique rays of the sun, all the windows began to flame and sparkle like hundreds of bonfires. It was like a triumph, a glory. And Delaveau remained there, drawing the *cretonne* curtains aside, and gazing at that triumph with his face close to the window-pane.

Even as Luc over yonder, at the other end of the lands of *La Crêcherie*, occasionally watched his town marching on, spreading out and threatening the Abyss with invasion, so Delaveau on his side often came to gaze at it, and found it ever growing, threatening him with conquest. How many times of recent years had he not lingered at that window, and on each occasion he had seen the rising tide of houses growing larger and drawing nearer to the Abyss. It had started from a remote point of a great stretch of uncultivated, deserted land; one house had appeared there like a little wave, then another, and another. And those waves had covered the whole space before them, and now they were only a few hundred yards away, and were rolling in a sea of

incalculable power, ready to carry off everything which might oppose them. To-morrow would witness an irresistible invasion; all the past would be swept away, the Abyss and Beauclair, too, would be replaced by the young and triumphant city. At one moment, when a very severe crisis had fallen on La Crêcherie, Delaveau had hoped that the advance would stop, but before long the new town had resumed its march so impulsively that the old walls of the Abyss were now already shaking. Yet he would not despair; he tried to stiffen himself against the evidence of facts, and flattered himself that he would find the necessary dyke and rampart in his own energy.

That particular evening, however, he was enervated by anxiety, and began to feel some covert regrets. Had he not formerly made a mistake in letting Bonnaire take himself off? He remembered certain prophetic words spoken by that strong, yet simple, man at the time of the great strike. And it was on the morrow of that strike that Bonnaire, like a good worker, had helped to found La Crêcherie. Since then the Abyss had scarcely ever ceased to decline: Ragu had besmirched it with attempted murder; Bourron, Fauchard, and others were quitting it as they might have quitted an accursed ruin-breeding spot. And afar off the new town was still flaming in the sunlight. At the sight of it sudden anger seized upon Delaveau—anger whose violence restored him to himself, to the beliefs of his whole life. No, no! he had been right, the truth was in the past; nothing could be extracted from men unless one bent them beneath the authority of dogma; the wage-system remained the true law of labour, and beyond its pale there could be naught save madness and catastrophe. Then Delaveau, intent on seeing nothing more, drew the large cretonne curtains together, lighted his little electric lamp, and again began to reflect as he strolled about his well-closed room, which the glowing stove rendered extremely warm.

At last, after dinner, Delaveau sat down at his writing table to attend to his letters, in accordance with the plans which he had been maturing for hours, plans whereby he hoped to save the business. Midnight struck and he still sat there, completing that worrying and difficult correspondence. And doubts had now come to him, he was again possessed by fear. Did salvation really lie in the direction he was taking? What would he be able to do, even if the delays

he asked for should be granted? Exhausted by the superhuman effort he was making to save the Abyss, he at last bowed his head and let it rest upon his hands. And thus he remained, deep in anguish. But at that same moment the rattle of a carriage was heard, and words rang out. Fernande had just returned from the dinner at La Guerdache, and was sending the servants to bed.

When she entered her husband's private room it was with hasty gestures and excited speech, like a woman who is beside herself, one who has been restraining and nursing her anger for hours.

'Good heavens, how hot it is here! How can one live with such a fire?'

Then sinking back in an armchair she unclasped and threw off the magnificent furs which covered her shoulders, and appeared in all her marvellous beauty, gowned in silk and white lace, with arms and bosom bare. Her husband expressed no surprise at her luxurious ways—he did not even notice them—he loved her solely for herself, her beauty; and passion always rendered him obedient to her whims, deprived him of both foresight and strength. Never, too, had a more intoxicating charm emanated from her person than at this period.

That evening, however, when Delaveau, with his head still buzzing, looked up at her, he became anxious: 'What is the matter with you, my dear?' he asked.

It was evident that she was greatly upset. Her large dark blue eyes, which as a rule had such a caressing expression, now glowed with a sombre fire. Her little mouth, which usually smiled in such a tenderly deceitful way, opened, showing her strong teeth, whose lustre nothing could tarnish, and which seemed ready to bite. And the whole of her face, which displayed such a charming oval under her black hair, was swollen as by a craving for violence.

'What is the matter with me?' she ended by saying, whilst she still quivered, 'Nothing.'

Silence fell again, and amidst the lifeless quietude of that winter night one heard the growling of the busy Abyss, the blows of whose hammers continuously shook the house. As a rule the Delaveaus remained unconscious of it, but that night, in spite of the falling off in business, the huge steam-hammer had been set to work to forge the tube of a great gun in all haste; and the ground quaked, the vibrations of

each blow seemed to resound in that very room, coming thither along the light wooden gallery which connected it with the works.

'Come, there is something the matter with you,' Delaveau resumed. 'Why won't you tell me what it is?'

A gesture of wrathful impatience escaped Fernande, who replied: 'Let us go to bed, that will be better.'

Nevertheless she did not stir; with feverish hands she continued twisting her fan, whilst her breath came short and quick, and her bosom heaved. At last she blurted out what was stifling her.

'So you went to La Guerdache this morning?'

'Yes, I went there,' answered Delaveau.

'And what Boisgelin has just told me is true, then? The works are in danger of bankruptcy, we are on the eve of ruin—such ruin, indeed, that I shall have to content myself with woollen gowns and dry bread!'

'I had to tell him the truth.'

Fernande was trembling, and had to restrain herself from bursting forth into reproaches and insults at once. It was all over, her life of enjoyment was threatened—nay, ended. No more festivities, neither dinners, nor balls, nor hunts, would be given at La Guerdache. Its doors would be closed to her, for had not Boisgelin confessed that he would perhaps be compelled to sell the property? And her dream of returning to Paris with millions to squander was ended also. All that she had imagined she held within her grasp, fortune, luxury, and pleasure, had crumbled to pieces. Nought but ruin encompassed her, and that wretched Boisgelin had increased her exasperation by his supineness, his cowardice in bending his head beneath the disaster.

'You never tell me anything about our affairs,' she continued bitterly. 'I'm treated as if I were a fool. That news fell on me as if the very ceilings were coming down. But if things are like that what are we going to do, just tell me?'

'We shall work,' Delaveau simply answered; 'there is no other means of salvation possible.'

But she did not hear his last words, she had ceased to listen. 'Did you for a moment imagine,' said she, 'that I should consent to remain with nothing to wear, to trudge about in worn-out boots and begin afresh that wretched life which I remember like a nightmare? Ah, no! I'm not like you others, I won't have it, I won't. You will have to

arrange something, you and Boisgelin between you, for I won't be poor again.'

Then she went on pouring forth all that was distracting her mind. There was her wretched youth, when living with her mother, the music teacher, she had failed to capture the prize which her great beauty had seemed to promise her—for after seduction she had been abandoned. And following upon that odious adventure, the memory of which she hid deep within her, had come her marriage, all calculation and diplomacy, the acceptance of that ugly insignificant Delaveau whom she had taken because she felt the need of some support, a husband whom she might put to use. And then had come a lucky stroke, the acquisition of the Abyss, the success of her plans, her husband procuring victory for her, Boisgelin conquered, La Guerdache and every luxury and enjoyment at her disposal. Twelve years had followed, replete with all the pleasures that she had tasted there, like the enjoyer, the perverter she was, satisfying her endless appetites and the dark rancour amassed within her since childhood, happy in lying, betraying, bringing ruin and disorder with her, and, in particular, exulting over the tears which she drew from Suzanne's eyes. But now, to think that this was not to last, that she was destined to relapse, vanquished, into the poverty of her former days!

'You must arrange something—arrange something,' she repeated. 'I won't go bare; I won't dispense with anything to which I have been accustomed!'

Delaveau, growing impatient, shrugged his sturdy shoulders. He was still resting his massive bulldog head, with projecting jaws, upon his two fists, whilst looking at her with his big dark eyes, his face reddened the while by the great heat of the fire.

'You were right, my dear,' said he, 'don't let us talk of these matters, for you seem to me to be scarcely reasonable to-night. I am very fond of you, as you know, and am ready to make any sacrifice to spare you suffering. But I hope that you will resign yourself to doing as I myself intend to do. I mean to fight as long as there is breath in my body. If necessary I shall get up at five in the morning, live on a crust of bread, give my whole day to work, and no doubt I shall go to bed at night feeling quite content. Besides, what if you do have to wear more simple gowns, and have to go out on foot! Only the other evening you yourself were telling me



how all these pleasures, ever the same, wearied and disgusted you !'

This was true. Fernande's blue, caressing eyes darkened till they almost became black as she thought of it. For some time past she had failed to satisfy her passion for enjoyment. Though she was unwilling to give up her present life, it palled upon her. She was full of rancour against both her husband and her lover, who no longer amused her, and she often wondered wrathfully whether she would ever feel amused again. Thus, it was with insulting contempt that she had greeted the lamentations of Boisgelin when the latter had told her of his despair at being compelled to cut down his expenses. And this also was why she had returned home in such a passion, eager to bite and to destroy.

'Yes, yes,' she stammered, 'those pleasures which are always the same ! Ah ! it isn't you who'll ever give me any new ones !'

In the works the heavy blows of the steam hammer still resounded, making the ground tremble. Long had that hammer forged delight for her, by wringing from steel the wealth she coveted, whilst the grimy flock of toilers gave their lives in order that her own might be one of full and free enjoyment. For a moment she listened to the dolorous commotion of labour sounding amidst the heavy silence. Then, with her savage hatred increasing, she turned upon her husband. 'It is all your fault if this has happened !' she cried, 'I told Boisgelin so. If you had begun by strangling that wretched Luc Froment, we should not now be on the eve of ruin. But you have never known how to conduct business.'

At this Delaveau abruptly rose from his chair, and, resisting the anger which was gaining on him, retorted, 'Let's go to bed. If we went on discussing, you would end by making me say things which I should regret afterwards.'

But she did not stir ; she continued speaking so bitterly, so aggressively, accusing her husband of having wrecked her life, that he, on his side, waxing brutal, at last exclaimed : 'Why, when I married you, my dear, you hadn't a halfpenny ; it was I who had to buy you some clothes. You were on the point of falling to the streets, and where would you have been now ?'

At this, thrusting her face and bosom forward, she answered, with a murderous glance, 'What ! do you imagine that, beautiful as I was, a prince's daughter, I should have

accepted such a man as you, ugly, common, and without position, if I had only had bread? Just look at yourself, my friend! I took you because you promised to win a fortune, a royal position for me. And if I tell you this it is because you have kept none of your engagements.'

Delaveau was now standing before her, letting her talk on, whilst clenching his fists and striving to retain his *sangfroid*.

'You hear!' she repeated, with furious obstinacy, 'none of your engagements—none! No more with Boisgelin than with me, for it's certainly you who have ruined the poor fellow. You prevailed on him to trust his money to you; you promised him a fabulous income, and now he won't even have enough money left him to buy a pair of shoes. When a man isn't capable of managing a large business, my friend, he remains a petty clerk, and lives in a hovel with a wife ugly enough and stupid enough to wash a pack of children, and mend their socks. Yes, bankruptcy has come, and it is your fault; you hear me, your fault—yours! yours alone!'

Delaveau was unable to restrain himself any longer. Those savage words tortured him as if a knife had been turned round and round in his heart and conscience. To think that he had loved that woman so well, and to hear her speak of their marriage as a base bargain, in which on her side there had only been so much necessity and calculation! For nearly fifteen years he had been striving so loyally and so heroically to keep the promise he had made his cousin, and yet she accused him of incapacity and lack of business knowledge! He caught hold of her bare arms with both hands, and shook her, saying in a low tone, as if he feared that the sound of his own voice might unhinge him, 'Be quiet, you unhappy woman; do not madden me!'

But she in her turn arose and freed herself, stammering with anger and pain at the sight of the red circles which his rough grasp had left round her delicate white arms. 'You beat me now, you blackguard, you brute!' she cried. 'Ah! you beat me, you beat me!'

And again she thrust forward her beautiful face, now convulsed by wrath, and spat out all her contempt full in that man's countenance which she longed to lacerate with her nails. Never had she hated him so much; never had the sight of his massive bulldog figure irritated her to such a degree as now. All the rancour amassed within her arose once more, urged her on to some irreparable insult which

should end everything. With instinctive cruelty she sought a means of inflicting some poisonous wound, something that should make him howl and suffer.

'You are only a brute!' she cried. 'You are not capable of directing a gang of ten men!'

At this singular insult, which seemed to him stupid and childish, Delaveau burst into convulsive laughter. And this laughter exasperated Fernande to such a point that she became half delirious. What could she say to him that would prove a mortal blow and bring his laughter to an end?

'Yes, it was I who made you what you are!' she exclaimed. 'If it had not been for me you would not have remained director of the Abyss a single year!'

At this he laughed all the louder: 'You are mad, my dear; you say such stupid things that they don't affect me!'

'I say foolish things, do I? So it was not thanks to me that you kept your place?'

Confession had suddenly risen to her throat. Ah! to shout it full in his dog's face, to shout that she had never loved him, and that she was another's mistress. That was the knife-thrust which would make his laughter cease. And how it would relieve her! what terrible and ferocious and voluptuous enjoyment she would taste in that collapse of her life which was already crumbling to pieces! She flung herself into the pit with a cry of horrible delight: 'The things I say are not stupid, for I've been Boisgelin's mistress for twelve years past.'

Delaveau did not immediately understand her. Those horrible words, striking him full in the face, had almost stunned him.

'What is that you say?'

'I say that I've been Boisgelin's mistress for twelve years past, and since there's nothing left, since all is falling to pieces, well, there, that's the end of it!'

In his turn half delirious, stammering, with his teeth clenched, Delaveau rushed upon her, caught hold of her arms, shook her, and threw her into the arm-chair. He would have liked to pound and annihilate all that provoking nudity which she displayed, her bare shoulders and bare bosom, to prevent her from ever insulting and torturing him again. The veil was at last torn away, and he saw and divined things clearly. She had never loved him; her life beside him had never been aught but hypocrisy, ruse, falsehood, and betrayal. From

that beautiful, polished, charming woman whom he had adored there suddenly emerged a she-wolf, all sombre fury and brutal instinct. Many things of the cause of which he had been ignorant had sprung from her; she was the perverter, the poisoner, who had slowly corrupted all around her; hers was the flesh of cruelty and treachery, whose enjoyment had been made up of the tears and blood of others.

But whilst he was still struggling with his stupefaction she insulted him again: 'With your fists, eh, you brute! Oh! go on, hit, hit, like your workmen do when they are drunk!'

Then, amidst the frightful silence which fell between them, Delaveau heard the rhythmic blows of the steam-hammer, the commotion of labour which, without a pause, accompanied both his days and his nights. The sound came to him like a well-known voice, whose clear language acquainted him with the whole of the horrible adventure. Was it not Fernande, with her little teeth of unchangeable lustre, who had devoured all the wealth which yonder hammer had forged? That burning thought possessed his brain: she was the devourer, the one cause of the disaster, of the squandering of millions, of the inevitable, approaching bankruptcy. Whilst he had been heroically striving to keep his promises, working eighteen hours a day, endeavouring to save the old and crumbling world, it was she who had gnawed at the edifice and rotted it. She had lived there beside him, looking so quiet, with her soft smiling face, and yet she herself was the poison, the destructive agent who had paralysed his efforts and annihilated his work. Yes, ruin had ever been present beside him, at his table, in his bed, and he had not seen it. She had shaken everything with her little agile hands, and pulverised everything with her little white teeth. He remembered nights when she had returned from La Guerdache, intoxicated by the caresses of her lover, by the wine she had drunk, by the waltzes she had danced, by the money which she had flung around her, and, when she had slept off that intoxication, lying by his side, whilst he, with his eyes wide open, peering into the darkness, tortured his brain in striving to devise some means for saving the Abyss, and did not even stir for fear of disturbing her slumber. And this, which seemed to him the supreme horror of all, inspired him with mad fury and made him shout: 'You shall die!'

She sat up in the chair, her elbows resting on its arms, her bare bosom and her charming face again thrust forward under her black casque of splendid hair: 'Oh! as for that I'm agreeable. I've had enough of you and the others, and myself, and life as well! I'd rather die than live in wretchedness.'

'You shall die! you shall die!' he howled, growing wilder and wilder,

But he had no weapon, and vainly sought one whilst he turned around the room. He had not even a knife, nothing save his two hands, with which he might strangle her. But what use would that be? What could he do afterwards—could he go on living? A knife would have sufficed for both.

She noticed his embarrassment, his momentary hesitation, and triumphed over it, believing that he would not again find the strength to kill her. And in her turn she began to laugh, with an insulting, taunting laugh. 'What! are you not going to kill me, then? Kill me, kill me then, if you dare!'

All at once, in the midst of his wild search for a weapon, Delaveau perceived the sheet-iron stove in which such a brasier of coke was glowing that the room seemed to be on fire already. And utter dementia suddenly fell upon him, making him forget everything, even his daughter, his fondly-loved Nise, who was sleeping quietly in her little room on the second floor. Oh! to make an end of himself, annihilate himself amidst the fury which transported him! Oh! to carry that hateful woman to death, so that she might never more belong to another, and to go with her, and cease to live, since life was now utterly soiled and wrecked!

She was still urging him on with her lashing, contemptuous laugh. 'Kill me! kill me then! You are far too big a coward to kill me!'

Yes, yes, thought Delaveau, to burn everything, to destroy everything by a huge conflagration in which the house and the works alike would disappear, a conflagration which would complete the work of ruin carried on by that woman and her idiotic lover! Ay, a gigantic pyre on which he himself would crumble into ashes with that malignant, devouring, lying creature, amidst the smoking ruins of that old social system which he had so foolishly striven to defend.

With a terrible kick, he overturned the stove, and pro-

jected it into the middle of the room, ever repeating his shout: "You shall die! you shall die!"

The red-hot coke spread in a red sheet over the carpet. Some pieces rolled as far as one of the windows. Then the cretonne curtains were the first to flare, whilst the carpet began to burn. The furniture and the walls flamed in their turn with overwhelming rapidity. The house, which was but lightly built, caught fire and sparkled and smoked like a mere wisp of hay.

The rest was frightful. Fernande had sprung up in her terror, gathering the silk and lace of her skirts together, and seeking a passage where the flames would not reach them. She darted towards the door opening into the hall, feeling certain that she would have time to escape, that she would reach the garden at a bound. But in front of the door she found Delaveau, whose arms barred her passage. He looked so terrible that she then sprang towards the other door, the one which opened into the wooden gallery, connecting the room with the works. But it was too late to flee in that direction—the gallery was burning, acting like a chimney, in which the draught urged on the flames with such rapidity that the adjacent business offices were already threatened. So she came back to the centre of the room, stumbling, blinded, suffocating, full of rage and terror at feeling that her dress was flaring, that her uncoiled hair also was catching fire, covering her bare shoulders with burns. And in a frightful voice she gasped:

'I will not die! I will not die! let me pass, murderer! murderer!'

Then again she threw herself towards the door opening into the hall, and strove to force a passage, rushing upon her husband, who still stood there, erect and motionless, full of fierce determination. Without any violence he simply repeated: 'I tell you that you are going to die.'

To force him to give way, she dug her nails into his flesh, and then only did he catch hold of her again and bring her back into the centre of the room, which had now become a perfect brasier. And here there was a horrible battle. She struggled with all her strength, which was increased tenfold by the dread of death; she sought the doors, the windows with the instinctive eagerness of a wounded animal; whilst he still kept her amidst the flames in which he wished to die, and in which he wished her to perish with him, in order that

the whole of their abominable existence might be annihilated. And to accomplish this he needed all the strength of his strong arms, for the walls were cracking, and ten times in succession did he have to drag her from the outlets by which she might have escaped. At last he imprisoned her in a final savage embrace, and they fell together amidst the embers of the flooring, whilst the last hangings burnt away like torches, and ardent brands rained from the woodwork overhead. And although she bit him, he did not release her, but held her fast, carrying her away into nothingness, both of them burning together with the same avenging fire. Soon all was over, the ceiling fell upon them with a great crumbling of flaming beams.

That night at La Crêcherie, as Nanet left the machinery gallery, where he was now serving his apprenticeship as an electrician, he perceived a red glow in the direction of the Abyss. At first he imagined that it came from the cementing furnaces. But its brightness increased, and all at once he understood the truth—the manager's house was on fire. He experienced a sudden shock, for he thought of Nise, and then ran off wildly and came into collision with the party-wall, over which, in former times, they had both climbed so nimbly in order to be together. And once again, with the help of hands and feet, he somehow got over the wall and found himself in the garden, alone as yet, for no alarm had been given. It was, indeed, the house that was burning, and the frightful feature of the conflagration was that like a fire lighted at the base of some huge pyre, it spread from ground-floor to roof, without anybody within showing sign of life. The windows remained closed, and the door was already burning, in such wise that one could neither go in nor out. It merely seemed to Nanet that he could hear some loud cries and a commotion like that of some horrible death struggle. But at last the shutters of one of the second-floor windows were flung back violently, and then, amidst the smoke, appeared Nise, all in white, wearing only her chemise and a petticoat. She called for help and leant out, terrified.

'Don't be frightened, don't be frightened,' cried Nanet in distraction, 'I'm going up.'

He had perceived a long ladder lying alongside a shed. But on going to take it he found that it was chained. A moment of terrible anguish ensued. The lad took up a large

stone and struck the padlock with all his strength in order to break it. Meantime the flames were roaring, and the whole of the first floor took fire amidst such an outpouring of smoke and sparks, that at certain moments Nise, up above, quite disappeared from sight. Nanet still heard her cries, however, which grew wilder and wilder, and he struck and struck the padlock, whilst calling in response: 'Wait! wait! I'm coming!'

At last the padlock was crushed and he was able to take the ladder. He never remembered afterwards how he had managed to set it erect. It was a prodigious feat; but he was able to rear it under the window. Then, however, he perceived that it was too short, and such was his despair at the discovery that his courage wavered. Boy hero that he was, only sixteen years of age, he was resolved to save that young girl of thirteen, his friend and playmate; but he was losing his head, and no longer knew how to act.

Nevertheless, he called again: 'Wait! wait! It doesn't matter, I'll come somehow!'

At that moment one of the two servant girls, whose garret bedroom had a window opening on to the roof, managed to get out, clutching hold of the guttering. But, maddened by terror, imagining that the flames were already reaching her, she suddenly leapt into space and fell, dead, with her skull broken, beside the flight of steps.

Nanet, unhinged by Nise's cries, which had become more and more frightful, fancied that she also was about to jump out. He pictured her lying at his feet, covered with blood, and he raised a last terrible call: 'Don't jump; I'm coming, I'm coming!'

Then, in spite of everything, the young fellow ascended the ladder, and when he reached the burning first floor he entered the house by one of the windows whose panes had been burst by the violence of the heat. Help was now arriving; there were a number of people already on the road and in the garden. And the throng spent some minutes of frightful anxiety in watching one child save the other with such wild bravery. The conflagration was still and ever spreading; the walls cracked, and the very ladder seemed to ignite as it stood against the house front, whilst neither the boy nor the girl reappeared. But at last Nanet came back, carrying Nise on his shoulders as a shepherd may carry a lamb. He had managed to climb through the furnace from



one story to the other, take her up, and come down again; but his hair was singed and his clothes were burning, and when he had slipped, rather than stepped, down the ladder with his well-loved burden, both he and she were covered with burns and fell fainting in one another's arms, clasped in so close an embrace that they had to be carried thus to La Crêcherie, whither Sœurette, who had now been warned, repaired to nurse them.

Half an hour later the house fell; not a stone of it remained standing. And the worst was that the fire, after reaching the general offices by way of the wooden gallery, had now gained the neighbouring buildings, and was devouring the great hall where the puddling-furnaces and the rolling-machinery were installed. The entire works were in danger; the fire blazed amidst those old buildings, almost all of which were of dry woodwork. It was said that the Delaveaus' other servant, having managed to escape by way of the kitchen, had been the first to give the alarm to the night-shifts, who had hurried up from the works. But they had no fire-engine, and nothing could be done till their comrades of La Crêcherie, headed by Luc himself, came in brotherly fashion to the help of the rival establishment with both engine and firemen. The Beauclair fire brigade, whose organisation was very defective, only turned up afterwards. And it was too late to save the Abyss; it was now blazing from one to the other end of its sordid workshops over an expanse of several acres, forming a huge brasier whence emerged only the lofty chimneys and the tower in which great cannon were tempered.

When the dawn rose after that night of disaster numerous groups of people still stood before the smouldering wreckage under the livid, chilly November sky. The Beauclair authorities, Sub-Prefect Châtelard and Mayor Gourier, had not quitted the scene of the catastrophe, and Judge Gaume was with them, as well as his son-in-law, Captain Jollivet. Abbé Marle, warned late, only arrived when it was light, and was soon followed by a stream of inquisitive folk, *bourgeois* and shopkeepers, the Mazelles, the Laboques, the Caffiaux, and even Dacheux. A gust of terror was sweeping by; one and all spoke with bated breath, their great anxiety being to know how such a catastrophe could possibly have taken place. Only one witness remained, the servant-girl who had managed to escape. She related that Madame had returned from La Guerdache about midnight, and that immediately afterwards

there had been some loud shouting, after which the flames had suddenly appeared. People listened to her, and repeated her story in low tones; and those who had been intimate with the Delaveaus divined the frightful tragedy which had taken place. It was evident, as the servant said, that Monsieur and Madame had perished in the fire. The horror, which was spreading, increased still further on the arrival of Boisgelin, who had to be helped out of his carriage, such was his faintness and pallor. He ended by swooning, and Doctor Novarre had to attend to him there, before that field of ruin where the remnants of his fortune were smoking, and where the bones of Delaveau and Fernande were at last crumbling into dust.

However, Luc continued directing the last efforts made by his men to save the still burning gallery where the steam-hammer was installed. Jordan, wrapped in a rug, obstinately remained in spite of the intense cold. Bonnaire, who had arrived one of the first, had distinguished himself by his courage in saving such machinery and appliances as was possible. Bourron, Fauchard, and all the other former hands of the Abyss who had gone to La Crêcherie, helped him, exerted themselves devotedly on that ground which they knew so well, where they had toiled for so many dolorous years. But destiny in its fury seemed to have transformed itself into a hurricane. In spite of all the efforts, everything was carried, swept away, and annihilated. Fire the avenger, fire the purifier had fallen upon the walls like lightning, razed everything, cleared the expanse of the ruins with which the downfall of the old world had littered it. And now the work was done, the ground stretched away clear and open, and the rising city of justice and peace might carry its conquering waves of houses even to the end of the great plains.

All at once Lange, the potter, the Anarchist, who stood in one of the groups of people, was heard saying in his rough but jovial voice: 'No, no, I haven't to pride myself on it, for I didn't light it. But, no matter, it's fine work, and it's rather funny that the masters should help us by roasting themselves.'

He was referring to the conflagration. And such was the shudder that passed through all his listeners that none attempted to silence him. The feelings of the throng impelled it towards the victorious forces; the authorities of Beauclair congratulated Luc on his devotion; the tradespeople and petty *bourgeois* surrounded the workers of La Crêcherie, at

last openly ranging themselves upon their side. Lange was right; there are tragic hours when decaying societies, stricken with madness, fling themselves upon the pyre. And now, of all those grimy works of the Abyss, where the wage-system had gasped in the last hours of dishonouring, accursed toil, there only remained against the grey sky a few crumbling walls supporting the frameworks of roofs, above which the high chimneys and the tempering tower alone rose up, useless and weebegone.

That morning, about eleven o'clock, when the sun at last made up its mind to show itself, Monsieur Jérôme passed by in his bath-chair propelled by a servant. He was making his usual promenade. He had just followed the Combettes road, skirting the works and the growing town of La Crêcherie, which looked so bright and gay in the dry, sunshiny weather. And now he beheld the field of defeat, the Abyss sacked and destroyed by the justice-dealing violence of the flames. For a long time his clear and empty eyes, as transparent as spring water, gazed upon the scene. He spoke no word, he made no gesture; he simply looked, and then was wheeled away, nothing about him telling whether he had really seen and understood.

## BOOK III

## I

THE blow was a terrible one at La Guerdache. Ruin suddenly fell upon that residence of luxury and pleasure, which had continually resounded with festivities. A hunt had to be countermanded, and it was necessary to stop the grand Tuesday dinners. The numerous domestics would have to be discharged *en masse*, and there was already some talk of the sale of the carriages, horses, and kennels. All the noisy life of the gardens and park, the endless affluence of visitors, had ceased. In the huge house itself the drawing-rooms, dining-room, billiard-room, and smoking-room became so many deserts, quivering with the blast of disaster. It was a stricken dwelling agonising in the sudden solitude born of misfortune.

To and fro through that infinite sadness went Boisgelin like a woeful shadow. Utterly overcome, with his mind almost unhinged, he spent the most frightful days, at a loss what to do with himself, wandering about like a soul in distress amidst the downfall of his life of enjoyment. He was at bottom a sorry being, a horseman and clubman, an amiable mediocrity whose fine presence and correct, proud mien—the mien of the fool who wears a single eyeglass—collapsed entirely at the first tragic gust of truth and justice. He had hitherto taken his pleasures like one convinced that they were due to him; he had never done the slightest work in his life; he imagined himself to be different from others—a privileged being, one of the elect, born to be fed and amused by the labour of others—and so how could he have understood the catastrophe which had so logically fallen upon him? His egotistical creed had received too severe a shock, and he remained in dismay before the future, respecting which he had not previously felt any disquietude. In the depths of his

bewilderment there was particularly the terror of the idler, the kept-man, one who was utterly upset by the thought that he was incapable of earning his living. As Delaveau was gone, from whom could he now demand the profits which had been promised him on the day when he had invested his capital in the Abyss? The works were burnt, the capital had vanished in the ruins, and where would he now find the money to live? He roamed like a madman through the deserted gardens and the lugubrious house without finding an answer to that question.

At first, on the evening following the tragedy, Boisgelin was haunted by thoughts of the frightful death of Delaveau and Fernande. He could have no doubt on the matter, for he remembered in what a mood the young woman had left him—full of wrath and pouring forth threats against her husband. It was certainly Delaveau who, after some terrible scene, had set fire to the house in order to destroy both the guilty woman and himself. In that vengeance, for a mere enjoyer of life like Boisgelin, there was a sombre ferocity, a monstrous violence, which inspired him with unending fright. But the greatest blow was to understand that he was deficient in strength of intellect, and that he lacked the necessary energy to set his affairs in order. From morning till evening he ruminated over various plans without knowing which to adopt. Would it be best to try to resuscitate the works, seek money and an engineer, endeavour to establish a company to carry on the business? He feared that he might not succeed in such attempts, for the losses were very great, and must in the first instance be made good. Ought he not rather to wait for a purchaser who would take the land, and such plant and materials as had been saved, at his risk and peril? But Boisgelin greatly doubted whether such a purchaser would ever turn up, and in particular he doubted whether he would obtain from him a sufficiently large sum to liquidate the situation. Moreover, the question of his future life still remained to be settled; for the estate of La Guerdache was an expensive one to keep up, and perhaps at the end of the month he would no longer have enough money to buy even bread.

In this emergency one sole creature took pity on the wretched, trembling, forsaken man, who roamed about his empty house like a lost child, and this was Suzanne, his wife, that woman full of heroic gentleness whom he had so cruelly

outraged. At the outset, when he had imposed his *liaison* with Fernande upon her, she had again and again resolved upon asserting herself and driving the intruder, the strange woman, from her house ; but in the end she had invariably refrained from taking that course, for she felt certain that if she were to drive Fernande away, her infatuated husband would follow her. Then, their relative positions being settled, Suzanne had taken a room for herself and had become a wife in name only, keeping up appearances in the presence of visitors, but devoting herself entirely to the education of Paul, whom she wished to save from disaster. Had it not been for that dear child, fair and gentle like herself, she would never have become resigned to the position. It was he who had brought about her renunciation, her sacrifice. She had removed him as much as possible from the influence of his unworthy father, anxious that his mind and heart, in which by way of consolation she hoped to cultivate sense and kindness, should belong to herself alone. In this wise years went by, amidst the delight of seeing him grow up reasonable and affectionate ; and it was only from a distance, so to say, that Suzanne had beheld the slow ruin of the Abyss and the growing prosperity of La Crêcherie. Like her husband, she had no doubt whatever that Delaveau, informed of the truth, had personally fired that huge pyre in order to destroy himself with that corrupting, devouring creature, his guilty wife. Suzanne shuddered as she thought of it, and asked herself if she had not in some small degree contributed to the catastrophe by her own resignation, her weakness, in tolerating betrayal and shame in her own home during so many years. If she had only rebelled at the outset, perhaps the crime would never have reached that climax. And her qualms of conscience quite upset her, and moved her to compassion for the wretched man whom, since the days of the catastrophe, she had seen roaming about like one demented, through the deserted garden and the empty house.

One morning, as she herself was crossing the grand drawing-room where Boisgelin had given so many *fêtes*, she perceived him there huddled up on an arm-chair, and sobbing and weeping like a child. She was quite stirred, filled with pity at the sight. And she, who for many years had never spoken to him unless it were necessary to do so in the presence of guests, drew near and said, 'It is not in despairing that you will find the strength you need.'

Amazed at seeing her there, at hearing her speak to him, he looked at her through the tears which blurred his eyes.

'Yes,' she continued, 'it is of no use roaming about from morning till night—you must find courage in yourself, you will not find it elsewhere.'

He made a gesture expressive of desolation, and answered in a faint voice: 'I am so much alone.'

He was not by nature an evilly disposed man; he was simply a fool and a weakling, one of those cowards whom egotistical pleasure turns into brutes. And it was with such utter dejection that he complained of the solitude in which she left him amidst his misfortune, that she again felt very touched.

'You mean,' she said, 'that you wished to be alone. Since those frightful occurrences why have you not come to me?'

'Good God!' he stammered, 'can you forgive me?'

Then he caught hold of her hands, which she left in his grasp, and, overwhelmed and wildly repentant, confessed his fault. He acknowledged nothing but what she knew already, his long betrayal, the mistress whom he had brought into his home, that woman who had maddened him and urged him on to ruin; but in accusing himself he displayed such passionate frankness that Suzanne was touched as by some spontaneous confession which he might have spared himself.

'It is true,' he ended by saying, 'I have wronged you so long, I have behaved abominably. Ah! why did you abandon me, why did you try nothing to win me back?'

His words awoke in her those qualms of conscience, the covert remorse which she felt at the thought that she had perhaps not done all her duty, that she had erred in not trying to stop him on his downward course. And the reconciliation which pity had initiated was completed by a feeling of indulgence. Are not the most pure, the most heroic partially responsible at times, when the weak and the erring succumb around them?

'Yes,' she said, 'I ought to have battled more, but I was too intent on sparing my pride and procuring quietude. We both have need of forgetfulness, we must regard all the past as dead.'

Then, as their son Paul happened to pass through the garden under the windows, she called him indoors. He was now a big fellow of eighteen, intelligent and refined, a son

after her own image, very affectionate and very sensible, free from all caste prejudices, and ready to live on the fruit of his own exertions whenever circumstances might require it. He had begun to take a passionate interest in the land, and spent whole days at the farm, busy with questions of culture, the germination of seed and harvesting of crops. As it happened, when his mother asked him to come in for a moment, he was about to repair to Feuillat's to see a new type of plough.

'Come in, my boy, your father is in great grief, and I wish you to kiss him,' said Suzanne.

There had been a rupture between father and son as between husband and wife. Won over entirely to his mother's side, Paul, in growing up, had felt nothing but cold respect for his father, whose conduct, he divined, must be the cause of his mother's frequent sorrow. Thus he now came into the drawing-room, feeling both surprised and moved, and for a few seconds remained gazing at his parents, whom he found so pale, so upset by emotion. Then, understanding the position, he kissed his father very affectionately, and flung his arms around his mother's neck, anxious to embrace her also with all his heart. The family bond was formed once more, and there came a happy moment, when one might have believed that agreement would henceforth be complete between them.

When Suzanne in her turn had kissed her son, Boisgelin had to restrain a fresh flow of tears. 'Good, good! now we all agree. Ah! that gives me some courage again. We are in such a terrible position! We shall have to come to some arrangement, take some decision.'

They went on talking for a little while, all three of them seated there together; for Boisgelin felt a desire to unburden himself and confide in that woman and that lad after roaming about alone so distressfully. He reminded Suzanne how they had bought the Abyss for a million, and La Guerdache for five hundred thousand francs, out of the two millions which had remained to them, the one which had formed her dowry, and the other which had been saved in the wreck of his own fortune. The five hundred thousand francs left out of the two millions had been handed to Delaveau, and had served as working capital for the Abyss. All their money was thus invested in that enterprise, but unfortunately during recent financial embarrassments it had been necessary to



borrow six hundred thousand francs, a debt which had weighed heavily upon the business. It really seemed as if the works were quite dead since they were burnt, and besides, before erecting them afresh it would be necessary to pay the debt of six hundred thousand francs.

'Then what do you intend to do?' Suzanne inquired.

Boisgelin thereupon explained the two solutions between which he hesitated, unable to adopt either, so great were the difficulties which attended both. On the one hand they might rid themselves of everything, sell what remained of the Abyss for what it would fetch—that is, no doubt, barely enough to pay the outstanding debt of six hundred thousand francs; or, on the other hand, they might try to find fresh funds, and establish a company, to which he would belong by contributing the land and the plant that had been saved. But here again there seemed little hope of effecting such a combination. Meantime, a solution was every day becoming more necessary, for their ruin was growing more and more complete.

'We also have La Guerdache—we can sell it,' remarked Suzanne.

'Oh! sell La Guerdache!' he answered in a despairing way. 'Part with this property to which we are so accustomed, so attached! And all to go and hide ourselves in some wretched hovel! What a downfall it would be, what a lot more grief it would bring!'

Suzanne became grave again, for she well perceived that he was not resigned to the idea of leading a reasonable modest life. 'We shall inevitably have to come to it, my friend,' said she. 'We cannot continue living upon such a footing.'

'No doubt, no doubt, we shall sell La Guerdache, but later on, when an opportunity presents itself. If we were to put it up for sale now we should not obtain half its value, for in doing so we should confess our ruin, and the whole district would league itself against us to rejoice and speculate on our misfortunes.' Then he added more direct arguments: 'Besides, my dear, La Guerdache belongs to you. As is stated in the deeds, the five hundred thousand francs of the purchase money were taken from your dowry, the remaining five hundred thousand francs of which formed half of the million which the Abyss cost us. Whilst we are co-proprietors of the works, La Guerdache is entirely your own property, and I simply desire to keep it for you as long as possible.'

Suzanne did not wish to insist on the subject, but she made a gesture as if to say that she had long since resigned herself to every sacrifice. Her husband was looking at her, and all at once he seemed to remember something.

'Oh, by the way,' he exclaimed, 'I've a question to ask you. Have you ever seen your old friend, Monsieur Luc Froment, again?'

She remained for a moment stupefied. Following upon the foundation of La Crêcherie and the acute rivalry which had ensued between that enterprise and the Abyss, had come a rupture with Luc, a rupture which had not been the slightest of her sorrows amongst her many bitter experiences. She felt that she had lost in Luc a cordial, consoling, brotherly friend who would have helped and sustained her. But once again she had resigned herself, and whenever she had chanced to meet him at long intervals, on one of the few occasions when she went out, she had never spoken to him. He imitated her discretion and renunciation, and it seemed as if their old intimacy were quite dead. Still this did not prevent Suzanne from taking quite a passionate interest in Luc's enterprise, an interest of which she spoke to nobody. In secret she remained upon his side in the generous efforts which he was making to set a little more justice and love upon the earth. Thus she had suffered with him and triumphed with him, and when at one moment she had imagined him to be dead, killed by Ragu's knife-thrust, she had for forty-eight hours shut herself up alone, far away from everybody.

In the depths of her grief she had then discovered an intolerable anguish; that *liaison* with Josine which Ragu's crime had revealed to her left a torturing wound in her heart. Had she then been in love with Luc without knowing it? Perhaps so, for had she not dreamt of the joy, the pride that she would have felt at having such a husband as he, one who would have turned fortune to such good and magnificent use? Had she not thought, too, that she would have helped him, and that between them they would have accomplished prodigies in the cause of peace and kindness? But he grew well again, and was now the husband of Josine; and Suzanne felt everything crumbling once more, leaving her nought but the abnegation of a sacrificed wife, of a mother who only continued living for her son's sake. From that moment Luc ceased to exist for her, and the question which her

husband had now put revived what seemed to be such a distant past that she was unable to hide her surprise.

'How can I have seen Monsieur Froment again?' she at last answered. 'You know that for more than ten years all intercourse between us has been broken off.'

But Boisgelin quietly shrugged his shoulders. 'Oh! that doesn't prevent it; you might have met him and have spoken to him. You agreed so well together formerly. So you have kept up no relations with him at all?'

'No,' she answered, somewhat sharply. 'If I had, you would know it.'

Her astonishment was increasing; she felt hurt by her husband's insistence; ashamed, too, at being questioned in that manner. What could be his object? why did he wish that she had kept up relations with Luc? In her turn she felt inquisitive, and inquired: 'Why do you ask me that?'

'Oh! for nothing—only an idea which occurred to me just now.'

Finally, he reverted to the subject, and revealed what he had on his mind. 'This is it. I was telling you a little while ago that we could adopt one of two courses; either sell the Abyss, rid ourselves of everything, or start a company to which I should belong. Well, there's also a third course, a combination, as it were, of both the others, and that would be to sell the Abyss to La Crêcherie, but in such a way as to reserve to ourselves the larger part of the profits. Do you understand?'

'No, not exactly.'

'But it is very simple. That fellow Luc must have a great desire to acquire our land. Well, he has done us enough harm; is that not so? And it is quite legitimate that we should get a large sum out of him. And our salvation certainly lies in that direction, particularly if we acquire an interest in the business which would enable us to keep La Guerdache without need of retrenchment in our manner of life.'

Suzanne listened with sorrow and dismay. What! he was still the same man as formerly; that frightful lesson had not corrected him! He only dreamt of speculating on others, of deriving profit from the situation in which they found themselves. And in particular he still had one sole object, that of doing nothing, of remaining an idler, a kept-man, otherwise a capitalist. In the wild despair amidst which he

had been struggling since the catastrophe there had been but terror, hatred of work, and one haunting thought: how could he so arrange matters that he might continue to live, doing nothing? His tears were already dry, and now, all at once, he reappeared such as he really was—a man intent on enjoyment.

However, Suzanne wished to know everything.

‘But what have I to do with this matter?’ she inquired; ‘why did you ask me if I had kept up any relations with Monsieur Froment?’

‘Oh, *mon Dieu*!’ he quietly replied; ‘because that would have facilitated the overtures which I think of making to him. As you can understand, after years of rupture, it is not easy to approach a man to discuss questions of interest, whereas things would be much easier if he had remained your friend. In that case you yourself, perhaps, might have seen him, spoken to him——’

With a sudden wave of her hand Suzanne stopped her husband: ‘I would never have spoken to Monsieur Froment under such circumstances. You forget that I had a sisterly affection for him.’

Ah, the wretched being! So now he had sunk to so low a degree of baseness that he was ready to speculate on such affection as Luc might have retained for her, and it was she whom he thought of employing to touch his adversary, in such wise that the latter might then be more easily conquered.

Boisgelin must have understood that he had hurt Suzanne’s feelings, for he could see that she had become much paler and colder, as if she had again withdrawn from him. He wished to efface that bad impression. ‘You are right,’ said he, ‘business is not a thing for women to attend to. As you say, also, you could not have undertaken such a commission. But all the same I am well pleased with my idea, for the more I think it over, the more convinced I feel that our salvation lies in it. I shall prepare my plan of attack, and find a means of opening up intercourse with the director of La Crêcherie—unless, indeed, I allow him to take the first steps, which would be a more skilful course.’

He was quite enlivened by the hope of duping another and deriving sustenance and pleasure from him as he had hitherto done. There would still be something good in life if one could live it with white and idle hands, ignorant of work. He rose, gave a sigh of relief, and looked on the great park.

It seemed more extensive still on that clear winter day, and he hoped to give fêtes in it again as soon as the spring should come. Finally he exclaimed : ' It would really be too stupid for us to distress ourselves. Can folk like ourselves ever become paupers ? '

Suzanne, who had remained seated, felt her painful sadness increase. For a moment she had entertained the naïve hope of reforming that man, and now she perceived that every tempest and revolution might pass over him without bringing amendment, or even understanding of the new times. The ancient system of the exploitation of man by man was in his blood, he could only live on others. He would always remain a big bad child who would fall to her charge later on should justice ever do its work. And thus she could only regard him with great and bitter pity.

Throughout that long conversation Paul had remained motionless, listening to his parents with his usual gentle, intelligent, and loving expression. All the feelings which in turn agitated his mother were reflected in his large pensive eyes. He was in constant communion with her, and suffered like herself at seeing how unworthy his father was. She at last perceived his painful embarrassment, and asked him : ' Where were you going just now, my child ? '

' I was going to the farm, mother ; Feuillat must have received the new plough for the winter ploughing. '

Boisgelin laughed : ' And that interests you ? ' he asked.

' Why yes, father. At Les Combettes they have steam ploughs which turn up furrows several thousand yards long now that all the fields have been joined together ; and it is superb to see the land turned up like that and fertilised. '

He was overflowing with youthful enthusiasm. His mother, who felt touched by it, smiled at him. ' Go, go, my boy, ' she said, ' go and see the new plough, and work—your health will be all the better for it. '

During the ensuing days Suzanne noticed that her husband evinced no haste in putting his project into execution. It seemed as if he deemed it sufficient to have discovered a solution which in his opinion would save them all. That done he relapsed into indolence, incapable of any effort. However, there was another big child at La Guerdache, whose manner suddenly caused Suzanne considerable disquietude. Monsieur Jérôme, her grandfather, who had just reached the advanced age of eighty-eight, in spite of the species of living death to

which paralysis had reduced him, still led a silent and retired existence, having no intercourse with the outer world apart from his frequent promenades in the bath-chair which a servant propelled. Suzanne alone entered his room and ministered to his wants, evincing the same loving attention as she had already shown when a mere girl, thirty years previously, in that same large ground-floor room looking towards the park. She was so accustomed to the old man's clear, fathomless eyes, which seemed, as it were, full of spring water, that she was able to detect the slightest shadow that passed over them. Now, since the recent tragical events, those eyes had darkened somewhat after the fashion of water when rising sand renders it turbid. For many monotonous years Suzanne had seen nothing in them, and finding them so limpid and so empty had imagined that power of thought had for ever departed from her grandfather. But was it now returning? Did not those shadows in Monsieur Jérôme's eyes, and his feverishness of manner, indicate a possible awakening? Perhaps, indeed, he had always retained his consciousness and intelligence; perhaps, too, by some kind of miracle, now when he was drawing nigh to death, the hard physical bond of paralysis was relaxing in some slight measure, releasing him from the silence and immobility in which he had so long lived imprisoned. It was with growing astonishment and anguish that Suzanne watched that slow work of deliverance.

One night the servant who propelled Monsieur Jérôme's bath chair ventured to stop her just as she was coming from the old man's room, quite stirred by the living glance with which he had watched her depart. 'Madame,' said the servant, 'I made up my mind to tell you. It seems to me that there is a change in Monsieur. To-day he spoke.'

'What! he spoke?' she answered, thunderstruck.

'Yes, even yesterday I fancied that I could hear him stammering words in an undertone when we halted for a little while on the Brias road in front of the Abyss. But to-day, when we passed before La Crêcherie, he certainly spoke, I'm sure of it.'

'And what did he say?'

'Ah, madame, I did not understand, his words were disconnected, one couldn't make sense of them.'

From that moment Suzanne, full of anxious solicitude, had a close watch kept upon her grandfather. The servant

received orders to report to her every evening what had happened during the day. In this wise she was able to follow the growing fever which seemed to have come upon Monsieur Jérôme. He was possessed by a desire to see and hear, he made it plain by signs that he wished to have his outings prolonged, as if he were eager for the sights which he found upon the roads. But he particularly insisted on being taken each day to the same spots, either the Abyss or La Crêcherie, and he never wearied of contemplating the former's sombre ruins and the latter's gay prosperity. He compelled his servant to slacken his pace, made him go past the same spot several times, and all the while he more and more distinctly stammered those disjointed words, whose sense was not yet apparent. Suzanne, quite upset by this awakening, at last sent for Doctor Novarre, whose opinion she was anxious to ascertain.

'Doctor,' said she, after explaining the case to him, 'you cannot conceive how it frightens me. It is as if I were witnessing a resurrection. My heart contracts, it all appears to me like some prodigious sign announcing extraordinary events.'

Novarre smiled at her nervousness, and wished to see things himself. But it was not easy to deal with Monsieur Jérôme; he had closed his door to doctors as well as to others; and besides, as his ailment admitted of no treatment, Novarre had for years abstained from making any attempt to enter his room. In the present instance the doctor had to wait for the old man in the park, where he bowed to him as he passed in his bath chair. Next he followed him along the road, and on drawing near saw that his eyes began to gleam whilst his lips parted, and a vague stammering came from them. In his turn Novarre felt astonished and stirred.

'You were quite right, Madame,' he came to tell Suzanne, 'the case is a very singular one. We are evidently in presence of some crisis affecting the whole organism, and arising from some great internal shock.'

'But what do you expect will happen, doctor?' Suzanne anxiously inquired, 'and what can we do?'

'Oh, we can do nothing, that is unfortunately certain, and as for foreseeing what such a condition may lead to, I won't attempt it. Yet I ought to tell you that if such cases are very rare they do occasionally occur. Thus I remember examining at the asylum of Saint-Cron an old man who had been shut

up there for nearly forty years, and whom the keepers, to the best of their remembrance, had never once heard speak. Quite suddenly, however, he appeared to awake, at first speaking in a confused manner, and then very plainly, whereupon an interminable flow of speech set in—whole hours of ceaseless chatter. But the extraordinary part of it was that this old man, who was regarded as an idiot, had seen, heard, and understood everything during his forty years of apparent slumber. And when he recovered the power of speech it was an endless narrative of his sensations and recollections stored within him since his entry into the asylum that poured from his lips.'

Although Suzanne strove to hide the frightful emotion into which this example threw her, she could not help shuddering. 'And what became of that unhappy man?' she asked.

Novarre hesitated for a second, then replied: 'He died three days afterwards. I must own it, madame, a crisis of that sort is almost always a symptom of approaching dissolution. One finds in it the eternal symbol of the lamp which throws up a last flame before going out.'

Deep silence reigned. Suzanne had become very pale. The icy breath of death swept by. But it was not so much the thought that her unhappy grandfather would soon die that pained her—she had another poignant fear. Had he seen, heard, and understood everything throughout his long paralysis, even after the fashion of the old man of Saint-Cron?

At last she summoned sufficient bravery to ask another question: 'Do you think, doctor,' she inquired, 'that intelligence has quite departed from our dear patient? In your opinion does he understand, does he think?'

Novarre made a vague gesture, the gesture of the scientist who does not consider it right to venture on any pronouncement respecting matters outside the pale of scientific certainty.

'Oh! you ask me too much, madame,' said he. 'Everything is possible in that mystery, the human brain, into which we still penetrate with so much difficulty. Intelligence can certainly remain intact after the loss of speech; because one cannot speak it does not follow that one is unable to think. However, I may say that I should formerly have believed in a permanent weakening of all Monsieur Jérôme's mental



faculties, I should have thought him sunk in senile infancy for ever.'

'Still, it is possible that he may have retained his faculties intact.'

'Quite possible; I even begin to suspect that such is the case, as is indicated by that awakening of his whole being, and that return of speech which seems to be coming back to him gradually.'

This conversation left Suzanne in a state of dolorous horror. She could no longer linger in her grandfather's room and witness his slow resurrection without a secret feeling of alarm. If amidst the mute rigidity in which he had been chained by paralysis he had indeed seen, heard, and understood everything, what a terrible drama must have filled his long silence! For more than thirty years he had remained an impassive witness, as it were, of the decline of his race, those clear eyes of his had beheld the rout of his descendants, a downfall accelerated from father to son by the vertigo born of wealth. In the devouring blaze of enjoyment two generations had sufficed to consume the fortune which his father and he had built up, and which he had deemed so firm. He had seen his son Michel ruin himself for worthless women directly he became a widower, and blow his brains out with a pistol-shot; whilst his daughter Laure, losing her head in mysticism, entered a convent; and his second son, Philippe, married to a hussy, perished in a duel after an imbecile career. He had also seen his grandson Gustave impel his father Michel to suicide by robbing him of his mistress and of the hundred thousand francs that he had collected for his business payments; whilst at the same time his other grandson André, Philippe's child, was relegated to a lunatic asylum. He had further seen Boisgelin, the husband of his granddaughter Suzanne, purchase the imperilled Abyss, and confide its management to a poor cousin, Delaveau, who, after restoring it to prosperity for a brief period, had reduced it to ashes on the night when he had discovered the betrayal of his wife Fernande and that coxcomb Boisgelin—the pair of them maddened by such a craving for luxury and pleasure that they had destroyed all around them. And he had seen the Abyss, his well-loved work, so small and modest when he had inherited it from his father, so greatly enlarged by himself, he had seen that Abyss, which he had hoped his race would make a city, the empire as it were of iron and steel,

decline so rapidly that with the second generation of his descendants not a stone of it remained standing. Finally, he had seen his race, in which creative power had accumulated so slowly through a long line of wretched toilers, till it had burst forth at last in his father and himself; he had seen his race spoilt, debased, and destroyed by the abuse of wealth, as if nothing of the Qurignons' heroic passion for work glowed among his grandchildren. And thus how frightful must be the story amassed in the brain of that octogenarian, what a procession of terrible occurrences, synthetising a whole century of effort, and casting light on the past, the present, and the future of a family! And what a terrifying thing, too, it was that the brain in which that story had seemed to slumber should at last slowly awaken to life, and that everything should threaten to come forth from it, in a great flood of truth, if indeed the tongue that already stammered should end by speaking plainly!

It was for that terrible awakening that Suzanne now waited with growing anxiety. She and her son were the last of the race; Paul was the sole heir of the Qurignons. Aunt Laure had lately died in the Carmelite convent where she had lived for nearly forty years; and Cousin André, cut off from the world since infancy, had been dead for many years already. Thus nowadays, whenever Paul went with his mother into Monsieur Jérôme's room, the old man's eyes, once more gleaming with intelligence, rested on him for a long while. That lad was the sole frail wattle of the oak from whose powerful trunk he had once hoped to see a number of vigorous branches, a whole swarming family, fork and grow. Was not that family tree full of new sap, health, and vigour, derived from sturdy, toiling forerunners? Would not his line blossom forth and spread around to conquer all the wealth and all the joy of the world? But, behold the sap was already exhausted with the coming of his grandchildren; in less than half a century a misspent life of wealth had consumed the whole strength amassed through a long ancestry! How bitter it was when that unhappy grandfather, the supreme witness surviving amidst so much ruin, found himself confronted by one sole heir, that gentle, delicate, refined Paul, who was like the last gift vouchsafed by life, which perhaps had left him to the Qurignons in order that they might grow afresh and flower in new soil! But what dolorous irony there was in the fact that only that quiet, thoughtful lad remained in that

huge, royal residence of La Guerdache which Monsieur Jérôme had originally purchased at such great cost, in the hope of seeing it some day peopled by his numerous descendants. He had pictured its spacious rooms occupied by ten households; he had imagined that he could hear the laughter of an ever-increasing troop of boys and girls; in his imagination the place became the happy, luxurious family estate where the ever-fruitful dynasty of the Qurignons would reign. But, on the contrary, the rooms had grown emptier day by day; drunkenness, madness, and death had swept by, accomplishing their destructive work; and then a final corrupting creature had come to complete the ruin of the house; and since the last catastrophe two-thirds of the rooms were kept closed, the whole of the second floor was abandoned to the dust, and even the ground-floor reception-rooms were only opened on Saturdays in order to admit a little sunshine. The race would end if Paul did not raise it up afresh; the empire in which it should have prospered was already naught but a large empty dwelling which would crumble away in abandonment unless new life were imparted to it.

Another week went by. The servant who attended Monsieur Jérôme could now distinguish certain words amidst his stammering. At last a distinct phrase was detected, and the man came to repeat it to Suzanne.

'Oh! he did not manage it without difficulty, madame, but I assure you that this morning Monsieur repeated: "One must give back, one must give back."'

Suzanne was incredulous. The words seemed to have no meaning. What was to be given back?

'You must listen more attentively,' she said to the servant; 'try to distinguish the words better.'

On the morrow, however, the man was still more positive. 'I assure madame,' said he, 'that Monsieur really says: "One must give back, one must give back."' He says it twenty and thirty times in succession in a low but persistent voice, as if putting all his strength into it.'

That same evening Suzanne determined to watch her grandfather herself, in order that she might understand things better. On the following day the old man was unable to get up. Whilst his brain seemed to be freeing itself from its bonds, his legs and soon his trunk were attacked by paralysis, and became quite lifeless. Suzanne was greatly alarmed by this, and again sent for Novarre, who was unable to do any-

thing, and warned her that the end was approaching. From that moment she did not quit the room.

It was a very large room, with very thick carpets and heavy hangings. A deep ruddy hue and a substantial and rather sombre luxury prevailed there. The furniture was of carved rosewood, the bed was a large four-poster, and there was a tall mirror in which the park was reflected. When the windows were open the view, beyond the lawns, between the old trees, stretched over an immense panorama in which one saw first the jumbled roofs of Beauclair, and then the Bleuse Mountains with La Crêcherie and its smelter, and the Abyss, whose gigantic chimneys still rose erect.

One morning Suzanne sat down near the bed, after drawing back the window curtains, in order to admit the winter sunshine; and all at once she felt greatly moved on hearing Monsieur Jérôme speak. For a few moments his face had been turned towards one of the windows through which he had been looking at the distant horizon. And at first he only uttered two words:

‘Monsieur Luc.’

Suzanne, who had distinctly heard them, was quite overcome with surprise. Why Monsieur Luc? Her grandfather had never had any intercourse with Luc, he ought to have been ignorant of his existence, unless indeed he was aware of what had lately occurred, had seen everything, and understood everything, even as hitherto she had only suspected and feared. Indeed, those words ‘Monsieur Luc,’ falling from his lips which had been sealed so long, were like a first proof that he had retained a lively intelligence amidst his silence, and could see and understand. Suzanne felt her anguish increasing.

‘Is it really Monsieur Luc that you say, grandfather?’ she asked.

‘Yes, yes, Monsieur Luc.’

He pronounced the name with increasing distinctness and energy, keeping his ardent glance fixed upon her.

‘But why do you speak to me of Monsieur Luc?’ she said. ‘Do you know him then? Have you something to say to me about him?’

Monsieur Jérôme hesitated, doubtless because he could not find the words he wished; then with childish impatience he repeated:

‘Monsieur Luc!’

'He used to be my best friend,' resumed Suzanne, 'but for long years now he has ceased coming here.'

Monsieur Jérôme quickly nodded his head, and then, as if his tongue were gradually acquiring the power of speech, he said: 'I know, I know—I wish him to come.'

'You wish Monsieur Luc to come to see you—you wish to speak to him, grandfather?'

'Yes, yes, it is that. Let him come at once—I will speak to him.'

The surprise and the vague fright that possessed Suzanne were now increasing. What could Monsieur Jérôme wish to say to Luc? There were such painful possibilities, that for a moment she tried to avoid granting the old man's request, as if indeed she imagined him to be delirious. But he was in full possession of his senses, and entreated her with increasing fervour, all the strength indeed remaining in his poor infirm frame. And at this Suzanne felt profoundly disturbed, asking herself if it would not be wrong of her to refuse the dying man's request for that interview, although she shuddered at the thought of the dimly threatening things which might result from it.

'Cannot you say what you wish to me, grandfather?' she ultimately asked.

'No, no—to Monsieur Luc. I will speak to him at once—oh, at once!'

'Very well, then, grandfather, I will write to him, and I hope that he will come.'

When Suzanne sat down to write, however, her hand trembled. She penned only two lines: 'My friend, I have need of you, come at once.' Nevertheless she was twice compelled to pause, for she lacked strength to trace even those few words, so painful were the memories that they aroused within her—memories of her lost life and of the happiness beside which she had passed, and which she would never know. At last, however, the note was written, and it was scarcely ten in the morning when one of the servants, a lad, set out to take it to La Crêcherie.

Luc, as it happened, was standing outside the common-house, finishing his morning inspection, when the note was handed to him; and without delay he followed the young messenger. But how great was the emotion which he felt on reading those simple yet touching words: 'My friend, I have need of you, come at once.' Events had parted him from

Suzanne for twelve long years, yet she wrote to him as if they had met only the previous day—like one, too, who was certain that he would respond to her appeal. She had not doubted his friendship for a moment, and he was touched to tears at finding her ever the same, still full of sisterly affection as in former times. The most frightful tragedies had burst forth around them, every passion had run riot, sweeping away men and things, yet after those years of separation they found themselves hand in hand once more. Whilst walking on quickly, and drawing near to La Guerdache, Luc began to wonder, however, why she had sent for him. He was not ignorant of Boisgelin's desire to speculate on the situation and sell the Abyss for as much money as possible; but he had resolved that he would never buy it. The only acceptable solution of the matter in his opinion was the entry of the Abyss into the association of La Crêcherie, after the fashion of the other smaller factories. For a moment it occurred to him that Boisgelin might have asked his wife to make overtures to him, but he knew her, and felt that she was incapable of playing such a part. It seemed to him that she must be exhausted by some great anxiety, that she must need his help in some tragic circumstance. And so he puzzled his mind no more—she herself would soon tell him what service she required of his affection.

Suzanne was waiting for him in one of the little drawing-rooms, and when Luc entered it she thought she was about to faint, so great became her perturbation. He himself felt upset, and at first neither of them could utter a word. They looked at one another in silence.

'Oh, my friend, my friend!' Suzanne murmured when she was at last able to speak.

Those simple words were fraught with all the emotion she felt at the thought of those last twelve years—their separation, broken only by a few silent chance meetings, the cruel life which she herself had led in her defiled home, and the work which he meantime had accomplished, and which she had watched from afar, enthusiastically. He had become a hero for her, she had worshipped him, and had longed to throw herself at his knees, nurse his wounds, and become his consoling helpmate. But another had stepped between them—Josine, who had caused her so much suffering that now all passionate love seemed dead. Nevertheless, at the sight of Luc standing once more before her all those hidden things rose from the

depths of her being, and the intensity of her emotion moistened her eyes and made her hands quiver.

'Oh, my friend, my friend!' she repeated, 'so it was sufficient that I should send for you!'

Luc quivered with a similar sympathy, and he also recalled the past. He knew how unhappily she had lived beneath the horrible insult offered to her, the presence of her husband's mistress in her home. He knew, too, what dignity and heroism she had shown in remaining in that home with head erect, for her son's sake and her own. Thus in spite of separation she had never been absent from his mind and heart—he had pitied her more and more at each fresh trial that fell upon her. He had often wondered how he might help her. It would have greatly delighted him to be able to prove that he had forgotten nothing, that he was still the same good friend as formerly. And this was why he had now hastened to respond to her first summons, full of an anxious affection which made his heart swell and prevented him from speaking.

At last, however, he was able to reply: 'Yes, your friend, one who has never ceased to be so, and who only awaited your summons to hasten here.'

They were at that moment so keenly conscious of the bond that for ever united them like brother and sister, that they embraced and kissed each other on the cheeks, even as friends who fear nought of human folly or suffering, but are certain that they will only impart peacefulness and courage to one another. All the strength and tenderness with which the friendship of man and woman may be instinct bloomed in their smiles.

'If you only knew, my friend,' said Luc, 'how great my fears were when I realised that my competition would end by destroying the Abyss! Was it not you whom I was ruining? And what faith in my work I needed to prevent those thoughts from staying my hand! Great sorrow often came upon me—I believed that you must curse me, that you would never forgive me for being the cause of the worries in which you must be struggling.'

'Curse you, my friend! But I was with you, I prayed for you—your victories were my only joy. And living in a sphere that hated you, it was very sweet for me to have a secret affection, to be able to understand and love you, unknown to everybody.'

'None the less I have ruined you, my friend,' Luc retorted. 'What will become of you now, accustomed as you have been since childhood to a life of luxury?'

'Oh, ruined! That would have come about without you! It was the others who ruined me. And you will see how brave I can be, no matter how delicate you may think me.'

'But Paul, your son?'

'Paul! Why, nothing happier could have befallen him. He will work. You know what wealth has done to my people.'

Then Suzanne at last told Luc why she had sent him such a pressing summons. Monsieur Jérôme, the wondrous awakening of whose intelligence she revealed, wished to speak to him. It was the desire of a dying man, for Doctor Novarre believed in his imminent dissolution. Astonished by these tidings even as she had been, seized too, like herself, with vague alarm at the thought of this resurrection in which he was so strangely desired to intervene, Luc none the less answered that he was entirely at her disposal, and ready to do whatever she might request.

'Have you warned your husband of Monsieur Jérôme's desire and my visit?' he inquired.

Suzanne looked at him and shrugged her shoulders. 'No, I did not think of it—besides, it is useless,' said she; 'for a long time past it has seemed as if my grandfather no longer knew that my husband existed. He does not speak to him, he does not even seem to see him. Moreover, my husband went out shooting early this morning, and he has not yet come home.' Then she added, 'If you will follow me, I will take you to my grandfather at once.'

When they entered Monsieur Jérôme's room, the old man, who was sitting up in the large rosewood bed supported by several pillows, still had his eyes turned towards the window whose curtains had been drawn back. In all probability he had never ceased gazing over the park and the spreading horizon, with the Abyss and La Crêcherie showing yonder, beside the Bleuse Mountains, above the jumbled roofs of Beauclair. It was a scene which seemed to attract him irresistibly, like some symbolism of the past, the present, and the future, which he had had before him during all his long silent years.

'Grandfather,' said Suzanne, 'I have had Monsieur Luc



Froment fetched for you. Here he is, he was kind enough to come at once.'

The old man slowly turned his head, and looked at Luc with his large eyes, which had grown it seemed yet larger than formerly, and which were now full of deep light. He said nothing, no word of greeting or thanks came from his lips, and the heavy silence lasted several minutes, whilst he kept his gaze fixed upon that stranger, the founder of La Cr  cherie, as if he were anxious to know him thoroughly, to dive indeed into his very soul.

At last Suzanne, who felt slightly embarrassed, resumed, 'You do not know Monsieur Froment, grandfather; but perhaps you may have noticed him when you were out.'

Monsieur J  r  me did not appear to hear his granddaughter, for he still returned no answer. After a moment, however, he once more turned his head and looked round the room. And failing to find what he sought he ended by speaking one word—a name—'Boisgelin.'

This caused Suzanne fresh astonishment as well as anxiety and embarrassment. 'You are asking for my husband, grandfather—do you wish him to come here?' she inquired.

'Yes, yes, Boisgelin.'

'But I am afraid that he has not come home yet. Meantime you ought to tell Monsieur Froment why you wished to see him.'

'No, no, Boisgelin, Boisgelin.'

It was evident that he wished to speak in Boisgelin's presence. Suzanne therefore apologised to Luc and left the room to seek her husband. Meanwhile Luc remained face to face with Monsieur J  r  me, conscious that the latter's bright glance was still and ever fixed upon him. In his turn he then began to scrutinise the old man, and found him looking wondrously handsome in his extreme old age, with his white face and regular features, to which the approach of death seemed to impart an expression of sovereign majesty. The wait was a long one, and not a word was exchanged by those two men, whose eyes dived into one another's. All around them the room with its heavy hangings and massive furniture seemed to be slumbering. Not a sound arose—there was naught but the quiver which came through the walls from the large empty closed rooms, the stories and stories which had been abandoned to dust. And nothing could have been more tragical or solemn than that spell of silent waiting.

At last Suzanne returned, bringing with her Boisgelin, who had just come home. He still wore his shooting-jacket, gloves, and gaiters, for she had not allowed him time to change his clothes. And he came in with an anxious, bewildered air, astonished at such an adventure. All that his wife had just rapidly told him of the summoning of Luc, his presence in Monsieur Jérôme's room, the old man's recovery of his intelligence, and the statement that he was awaiting him—Boisgelin—before speaking, all those unforeseen occurrences quite upset Suzanne's husband, who had not been allowed even a few minutes of reflection.

'Well, grandfather,' said Suzanne, 'here is my husband. Speak if you have something to tell us. We are listening.'

But again the old man looked round the room, and once more he asked, 'Paul, where is Paul?'

'Do you want Paul to be here too?'

'Yes, yes, I want him.'

'But the fact is that he must be at the farm. Fully a quarter of an hour will be necessary to fetch him.'

'He must come—I want him, I want him!'

Suzanne yielded, and hastily despatched a servant for her son. And then the waiting began afresh, and proved even more solemn and tragic than before. Luc and Boisgelin had simply bowed to one another, finding nothing to say on meeting after so many years in that room which an august breath already seemed to fill. Nobody spoke, and amidst the quiver of the air one only heard the somewhat heavy respiration of Monsieur Jérôme. Once again his large eyes, full of light, were turned towards the window, towards that horizon symbolical of the labour of manhood, where the past had undergone accomplishment, and where the future would be born. And the minutes went by, slowly, regularly, in that anxious wait for what was to come, the act of sovereign grandeur whose approach could be divined.

Some light footsteps were heard at last, and Paul came in, his face glowing healthily from contact with the open air.

'My boy,' said Suzanne, 'it is your grandfather who has brought us all together here. He wishes you to be present while he speaks.'

On the hitherto rigid lips of Monsieur Jérôme a smile of infinite tenderness had at last appeared. He signed to Paul to approach, and made him sit down as near as possible, on the edge of the bed. It was particularly for him, the last heir

of the Qurignons, through whom the race might flower anew and yet yield excellent fruit, that he desired to speak. And on seeing how moved the youth looked, full of grief at the thought of a last farewell, he continued for a moment trying to reassure him with his affectionate glances, like one to whom death was sweet since he was about to bequeath as inheritance to his great-grandson an act of goodness, justice, and pacification.

At last he began to speak, amidst the religious silence of one and all. He had turned his face towards Boisgeline, and at first he merely repeated the words which his servant had for two days past heard him stammering in an undertone, amidst other confused utterances :

‘ One must give back, one must give back ! ’

Then, seeing that the others did not appear to understand what he meant, he turned to Paul and repeated with growing energy :

‘ One must give back, my child, give back ! ’

Suzanne shuddered, and exchanged a glance with Luc, who also was quivering ; whilst Boisgeline, seized with uneasiness and alarm, pretended to detect in all this some rambling on the old man’s part. But Suzanne inquired : ‘ What do you desire to tell us, grandfather—what is it that we must give back ? ’

Monsieur Jérôme’s speech was fast becoming easier and more distinct. ‘ Everything, my child—the Abyss yonder must be given back ; La Guerdache must be given back. One must give back the land of the farm. Everything must be given, because nothing ought to belong to us, because everything ought to belong to all.’

‘ But explain to us, grandfather—to whom are we to give these things ? ’

‘ I tell you, my girl, they must be given back to all. Nothing of what we thought to be our property belongs to us. If that property has poisoned and destroyed us, it is because it belonged to others. For our happiness, and the happiness of all, it must be given back, given back ! ’

Then came a scene of sovereign beauty, incomparable grandeur. The old man did not always find the words he desired, but his gestures indicated his meaning. Amidst the silence of those who surrounded him, he went on slowly, and in spite of all difficulties succeeded in making himself understood. He had seen everything, heard everything, understood

everything, and even as Suzanne had divined with quivering anguish, it was all the past which now came back, all the truth of the terrible past, pouring forth in a flood from that hitherto silent, impassive witness, so long imprisoned within his own body. It seemed as if he had only survived the many disasters, a whole family of happy, then stricken, beings, in order to draw from everything the great lesson. On the day of awakening, before going to his death, he spread out all the torture he had suffered as one who, after believing in the triumphant reign of his race over an empire established by himself, had lived long enough to see both race and empire swept away by the blast of the future. And he told why all this had happened, he judged it, and offered reparation.

At the outset came the first Qurignon, the drawer who with a few mates had founded the Abyss, he being as poor as they were, but probably more skilful and economical. Then came himself, the second Qurignon, the one who had gained a fortune, and piled up millions in the course of a stubborn struggle, in which he had displayed heroic determination, ceaseless and ever-intelligent energy. But if he had accomplished prodigies of activity and creative genius, if he had gained money, thanks to his skill in adapting the conditions of production to those of sale, he knew very well that he was simply the outcome of long generations of toilers from whom he had derived all his strength and triumph. How many peasants perspiring as they tilled the glebe, how many workmen exhausted by the handling of tools had been required for the advent of those two first Qurignons who had conquered fortune! Among those forerunners there had been a keen passion to fight for life, to make money, to rise from one class to another, to pursue all the slow enfranchisement of the poor wretch who bends in servitude over his appointed task. And at last one Qurignon had been strong enough to conquer, to escape from the gaol of poverty, to acquire the long-desired wealth, and become in his turn a rich man, a master! But immediately afterwards, that is in two generations, his descendants collapsed, fell once more into the dolorous struggle for existence, exhausted already as they were by enjoyment, consumed by it as by a flame.

'One must give back, one must give back, one must give back!' repeated Monsieur Jérôme.

There was his son Michel, who after years of excesses had killed himself on the eve of a pay-day; there was his

other son Philippe, who, having married a hussy, had been ruined by her, and had lost his life in a foolish duel. There was his daughter Laure, who had died in a convent, her mind weakened by mystical visions. There were his two grandsons, André, a rachitic semi-maniac, who had passed away in an asylum, and Gustave, who had met a tragic death in Italy after impelling his father to suicide by robbing him of his mistress and the money he needed for his business payments. Finally, there was his granddaughter Suzanne, the tender-hearted, sensible, well-loved creature, whose husband after repurchasing the Abyss and La Guerdache had completed the work of destruction. The Abyss was now in ashes, and La Guerdache, where he had hoped to see his race swarming, had become a desert. And whilst his race had been collapsing, carrying off both his father's work and his own, he had seen another work arise, La Crêcherie, which was now full of prosperity, throbbing with the future that it brought with it. He knew all those things because his clear eyes had witnessed them in the course of his daily outings, those hours of silent contemplation, when he had found himself outside the Abyss at the moment when one or another shift was leaving, or outside La Crêcherie where the men who had deserted his own foundation took off their caps to him. And again he had passed before the Abyss on the morning when of that well-loved creation he had found nought but smoking ruins left.

'One must give back, one must give back, one must give back!'

That cry, which he constantly repeated amidst his slowly flowing words, which he emphasised each time with more and more energy, ascended from his heart like the natural consequence of all the disastrous events which had caused him so much suffering. If everything around him had crumbled away so soon, was it not because the fortune which he had acquired by the labour of others was both poisoned and poisonous? The enjoyment that such fortune brings is the most certain of destructive ferments—it bastardises a race, disorganises a family, leads to abominable tragedies. In less than half a century it had consumed the strength, the intelligence, the genius which the Qurignons had amassed during several centuries of rough toil. The mistake of those robust workers had been their belief that to secure personal happiness they ought to appropriate and enjoy the wealth created

by the exertions of their companions. And the wealth they had dreamt of, the wealth they had acquired, had proved their chastisement. Nothing can be worse from the moral point of view than to cite as an example the workman who grows rich, who becomes an employer, the sovereign master of thousands of his fellow-men who bend perspiring over their toil, producing the wealth by which he triumphs! When a writer says: 'You see very well that with order and intelligence a mere blacksmith may attain to everything,' he simply contributes to the work of iniquity, and aggravates social disequilibrium. The happiness of the elect is really compounded of the unhappiness of others, for it is their happiness which he cuts down and purloins. The comrade who makes his way, as the saying goes, bars the road to thousands of other comrades, lives upon their misery and their suffering. And it often happens that the happy one is punished by success, by fortune itself, which coming too quickly and disproportionately, proves murderous. This is why the only right course is to revert to salutary work, work on the part of all—all earning their livings and owing their happiness solely to the exertion of their minds and their muscles.

'One must give back, one must give back, one must give back!' repeated Monsieur Jérôme.

One must give back, indeed; one must restitute because one is liable to die of that which one steals from another. One must give back, because the sole cure, the only certainty of happiness lies in doing so. One must give back in a spirit of justice, and even more in one's own personal interest, since the happiness of each can only reside in the happiness of all. One must give back in order that one may enjoy better health and live a happy life in the midst of universal peace. One must give back because if all the unjust victors of life, all the egotistical holders of the public fortune, were to restore the wealth that they squander for their personal pleasures—the great estates, the great industrial enterprises, the roads, the towns—peace would be restored to-morrow, love would flower once more among men, and there would be such an abundance of possessions that not one single being would be left in penury. One must give back because one must set the example if one desires that other wealthy folk may understand, may realise whence have come all the evils from which they suffer, and may be inspired to endow their descendants with renewed vigour by plunging them once more into active life, daily

work. One must give back, too, whilst there is yet time to do so, whilst there is still some nobility in returning to one's comrades, in showing them that one was mistaken, and that one returns to one's place in the ranks to participate in the common effort, with the hope that the hour of justice and peace will soon strike. And one must give back in order to die with a clear conscience, a heart joyful at having accomplished one's duty, at leaving a repairing and liberating lesson to the last of one's race, so that he may restore it, save it from error, and perpetuate it in strength, delight, and beauty.

'One must give back, one must give back!'

Tears had appeared in Suzanne's eyes as she perceived the exaltation with which her son Paul was filled by her grandfather's words; whilst Boisgelin expressed his irritation by impatient movements.

'But, grandfather,' said she, 'to whom and how are we to give back?'

The old man turned his bright eyes upon Luc. 'If I desired the founder of La Crêcherie to be present,' said he, 'it was in order that he might hear me and help you, my children. He has already done much for the work of reparation, he alone can intervene and restore what remains of our fortune to the sons and grandsons of those who were my own and my father's comrades.'

Luc was filled with emotion by the wondrous nobility of the scene, yet he hesitated, for he could divine Boisgelin's keen hostility. 'I can only do one thing,' said he—'that is, if the owners of the Abyss are willing I will procure them admission into our association at La Crêcherie. In the same way as other factories have already done, the Abyss will increase our family—double, in fact, the importance of our growing town. If by 'giving back' you mean a return to increase of justice, a step towards the absolute justice of the future, I will help you, I will consent to what you say with all my heart.'

'I know you will,' Monsieur Jérôme slowly answered; 'I ask nothing more.'

But Boisgelin, unable to restrain himself any longer, began to protest. 'Ah! that is not what I desire. However much it may distress me to do so, I am willing to sell the Abyss to La Crêcherie. A price will have to be agreed upon, and in addition to the amount which may be fixed I desire to retain an interest in the enterprise, which also will have to be arranged. I need money and I wish to sell.'